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Living Within Merleau-Ponty's Reversibility

by

Robert Allan Kramchynski ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Philosophy

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1996

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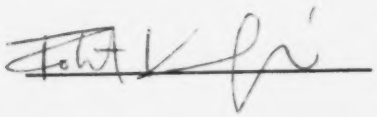

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Living Within Merleau-Ponty's Reversibility* submitted by Robert A. Kramchynski in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT:

Upon what essential ontological commitments does the fullest account of 'meaning' ultimately rely? Can there be extra-linguistic meaning? If so, does linguistic meaning itself crucially depend upon the experiences of such essences as described by phenomenology?

Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed a unique ontology (the study of being) centered upon an ambiguous dynamism between activity and being. A consequence of his phenomenology is that we cannot discover any permanent, static truth because our 'being-within-the-world' is itself in a constant motility. His theory of 'Reversibility' concerns the particular nature of human conscious-acts, where each person is a project of the world and each person's perceived world is a projection, in reverse, of that initial relation.

This thesis intends to answer two questions. What does living mean within this 'Reversibility"? How does the accompanying theory of meaning speak to the postmodern proclamation of the death of the subject?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

As I began the Master's programme I worried about my specific lack of direction, but Professor Bruce Hunter assured me that perhaps this could be an advantage rather than a liability, and I believed him. In the intervening two years I have come to embrace that belief and to appreciate its affording me a wide horizon from which to interpret my own philosophical interests.

I want to first of all express my love and appreciation to my family and friends who have taught me how to 'see.' And to my colleagues who have shown me how to 'say' ... a special thankyou to Phillip Mueller with whom I experienced many spontaneous and aesthetically fulfilling philosophical dialogues. Aaron Fellbaum, who made the late Eighteenth Century philosophy more relevant to me, and Professor Alex Rueger, who suggested that I read both Humboldt and Herder, thanks for the excellent direction. All the students and staff in the Philosophy Department, Anita and Wendy included, have been wonderful to 'play' with. Greg Emerson and Sophia Wong have made my stays in Edmonton more joy-filled. For Joachim Ludwig a thanks for helping me to face the single philosophical problem which encompasses them all: the subject-object dichotomy. And especially, an embracing thank-you to my friend Susan Turner who turned our aesthetic experiences into 'lived-symphonies' (metaphors included).

My supervisor, Professor Margaret Van de Pitte who, it seems in hindsight, understood this project better than I did from the start and helped me to make sense of it through her advice and recommended texts and readings, cannot be thanked enough. I especially appreciate her openness to new and sometimes unconventional perspectives, and I really feel that this was somehow *our* project. A warm gesture of appreciation to Professor Robert Burch who pointed me to Merleau-Ponty and to Taylor, and through whose excellent critique and commentary on my original 'Gestalt' project helped me to formulate the idea for this thesis. I also wish to thank Professors Wesley Cooper and Eamonn Callan for their questions (and sense of the 'aesthetic') which will encourage me to further assess the relevance of this work in a larger context.

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INTRODUCTION:

"One of the immense merits of phenomenology consists in having restored to man the right to an authentic existence by abolishing the opposition between subject and object. It is impossible to define an object while cutting it off from the subject by which and for which it is object. And the subject reveals itself only through objects in which it engages itself. Such an affirmation merely makes explicit the content of our naive experience. But it is rich in consequences. Only by making it one's foundation will one succeed in building an ethics to which man can totally and sincerely adhere. Hence it is of extreme importance to establish solidly and restore to man that child-like audacity of which his years of verbal docility have deprived him: the audacity to say, "Here I am.""

- Simone de Beauvoir[1]

The explicit aim of my thesis is to follow Existential Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his project of incarnating the subject. I want to examine the immediate consequences of his existential repositioning of the subject into the phenomenal body, as well as his resulting search for a phenomenology of meaning from this new perspective.

To introduce the thesis I can give a summary of the definition Merleau-Ponty himself attaches to the question,

"What is phenomenology? ...Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than of their 'facticity'. It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins - ...all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. ...it also offers an

---

[1] From Les Temps Modernes I - 1946, in her review of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception;* as quoted in translation by Herbert Spiegelberg in his *The Phenomenological Movement;* (1960, p. 512).

account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them."[2]

Chapter one will begin with a brief look at Modern Western philosophy, taking into consideration the Cartesian notion of a *cogito* and its impact upon modern thought. The three centuries of thought since Descartes have been the ongoing history of the struggle within the dualism of subject and object. Several philosophical movements have sprung from the need to overcome this apparently incommensurable separation and offer us the hope of a unified truth. Some thinkers have eloquently claimed success at this project of synthesis, but none of these claims has met with widespread approval. In the past thirty years we have seen a radical shift toward the abandonment of this project. Postmodern philosophers embrace the notion of a relative truth in the form of an ongoing process. For them, as for Merleau-Ponty, *"Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being."*[3] Most contemporary thinkers have also rejected the concept of a transcendental subject: the metaphysical notion of *mind* as something existentially distinct from *matter* (even as active or living).

We shall begin our journey into meaning, and the dualism with which is has been implicated, with an examination of Edmund Husserl's Theory of Intentionality (haunted as it is by the Cartesian and Kantian ghosts of transcendental subjectivity). Husserl's emphasis on the experiential nature of meaning leads directly into an account of the foundations of our living experience within the perceptual act.

Chapter two will introduce us to the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, one of several Existential Phenomenologists who carries on the Husserlian project albeit with substantial transformations. His dynamic "lived-body" notion grounds an account of a "pre-linguistic perception" in which the senses play a cognitive role. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of perception introduces

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[2] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. vii.

[3] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xx.

several new concepts such as "lived-experience," "reversibility" and "silence" which open up significant new possibilities for a more adequate account of meaning. However, his adoption of some of Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist theories may, in fact, ultimately prevent him from completing this aspect of his work.

In chapter three we will explicate Merleau-Ponty's theory of "Reversibility" that is his attempt to give us a coherent view as to how perception and dialogue combine with a lived-body and a lived-world to produce the sort of awareness that we possess. His notion of "silence" as the phenomenon which stands between perception and language-use will be more fully articulated, with special emphasis on the problematic of this phenomenon in regard to giving a proper account of meaning. This negative role and his adherence to certain aspects of Saussure's Structuralism play awkwardly in the attempt to produce a theory of meaning which accords adequately with his ontology.

In chapter four, we shall look back to Johann Herder in order to speak to the problem of 'the emergence of language' and in pursuing his ideas I shall turn to the recent works of Colin Falck and Charles Taylor. They show my conviction that Herder offers us an interesting concept of how pre-linguistic reflection occurs and has a theory concerning the expressive and living nature of language itself which has not received the attention that it deserves.

Friedrich Schiller contributes to our discussion with his thesis *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* where he offers a return to a primary feeling of pure perceptual awareness through our sensual encounters with aesthetic experience. Taylor and Falck help to place some of Schiller's ideas into a contemporary context.

Taking the insights of the romantics in a revised and updated version, chapter five will combine them with some of the latest offerings from language-acquisition theorists, as well as

with the findings of Merleau-Ponty and develop what we hope is a robust theory of meaning. We will then examine how this theory fits in with both Husserl's intentionality and Merleau-Ponty's reversibility.

Chapter six will conclude the thesis with a brief summary of how this phenomenological theory of meaning addresses some of the more explicit inadequacies of meaning theory as advocated by some postmodernist views, as well as by some American materialists and causal theorists.

CHAPTER ONE: POSTMODERNISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY

"This is a time in which many voices are heard speaking in cacophony of tongues. If modernity was a time in which the disguise of secularity was torn from the body of the Transcendental Subject to reveal the self-dissembling phallic author, still intoning his own name even as he expired, his truth being crossed out by understanding, then the time after modernity is a time when authority establishes itself as such by the tearing of vestments. All devastated by this devastating divestiture, we are levelled out on a plane above those still adorning themselves with the Emperor's clothes. Freed to pick our own metaphors, we are comforted by the reassurance that our signifiers are secure from attack by an epistemological superior. We deploy our discourses in marginal spaces strategically crafted to keep the space of the maintext blank: we know what is not true."

- Martin C. Dillon[4]

How has it come down to this vision, to diverse bodies of fragmented philosophical discourses, each claiming just as fervently that they "know what is not true?"

The project which we call modernism was built on what appeared to be solid foundations, why has it crumbled? Was there a certain turn in that history of our dialogue which closed the door on some vital aspect of our human existence and banished something crucial, something that we all deeply share, from the intellectual discourse? Was there a particular historical point where science as an empirical inquiry (or some other movement in the form of a critical skepticism) drowned out the relevance of art or life itself and became the standard by which all human enterprises were to be measured? Is that cleavage still evident, as we watch two quite distinct philosophical traditions manifest themselves in the West today? This sense of crisis and perhaps loss is not so much changed from Merleau-Ponty's time.

"Western philosophy is not only divided, which would be natural, but even worse partitioned, Logical Positivism reigns in Anglo-American countries and Scandinavia, the Heidegger Circle thrives in Freiburg, and philosophers inspired by phenomenology and marxism are writing in France and Italy

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[4] From *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, edited by M.C. Dillon; p. xi.

today (1960)."[5]

In keeping with the theme of Dillon's quotation at the top of this chapter, is it possible, finally, to recover what was lost and try to remake our torn clothing? Or can we at least find some personal comfort as we stand here naked before ourselves like innocent children and, in a richer echo of de Beauvoir's introductory quote, say "Here *we* are!"

—Postmodernity and Language—

Presently, the analysis of language has become the primary common thread of pursuit amongst most of the philosophies. The postmodernism on the Continent has many distinct groups, but they seem to share one standard element in that the cultural aspect of language has become their main critical concern. Language is central in the playing out of power-relations (Foucault), in the neo-nihilism of literary deconstruction (Derrida), in the existential and spiritual poetics (Ricoeur), and even in some of the distinctly modernist approaches in rational social theory and discourse (Habermas). While in the Anglo-American arena, except for the narrative-driven pragmatism with its concern for cultural language theory (Rorty), most contemporary discourse is centered on the language of science, as in the naturalized epistemologies (Quine), the logic-based empirical realism (Putnam), the scientific realism and eliminative materialism (Churchland), and the scores of materialist cognitive-science and causal language theories (from the Australian group to Davidson, Dennett, et al). Language appears to be the primary investigative domain of these mostly subject-less (non-self-conscious) philosophical pursuits. Some are interested in the cultural intersubjectivity of the social text, others are more concerned with the objective intersubjectivity of the scientific text. Only the works of Foucault and Ricoeur, of the ones mentioned above, remain crucially

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[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *An Interview with Madeleine Chapsal* (1960); from *Texts and Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Silverman & James Barry Jr.; p.8.

interested in the place of the living, embodied subject in the face of a human horizon disappearing into a technological culture of controlled anonymity.

There are, of course, many other important philosophical discourses, perhaps as many as there are philosophy departments in the Western nations. The existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty is one such school of philosophy, one which is presently experiencing a revitalized upsurge in the wake of the postmodern wave. Before we engage in our study of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its ontological concern with the embodied-subject, we shall turn, for background, to a brief account of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theory of meaning.

---Phenomenology and the *Cogito*---

Phenomenology, simply defined, is the experiential study of phenomena. James Edie calls it,

> *"the "science" of all the various kinds of "objects" which can be given to consciousness. ...it differentiates the various regional ontologies by eidetically distinguishing among them...- in other words, the consciousness which thinks the world also correlatively and at the same time perceives, imagines, remembers, feels, values, questions, believes, desires, chooses, hopes, etc. ..."*[6]

There are other versions, *"Phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty sees it, attempts to catch the facts in their uniqueness prior to all linguistic formulations."*[7] Maurita Harney gives us a Husserlian definition,

> *"Phenomenology is the description of the structures of intentionality. The description of acts of consciousness must be free of any presuppositions which appeal to 'transcendent realities;' a phenomenological description cannot presuppose any metaphysical theories concerning, e.g. the reality of the object intended in an act. Nor can it presuppose any distinctions which are postulated 'from*

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[6] James Edie, *Speaking and Meaning;* p. 2.

[7] Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement;* p. 535.

outside' the phenomenological standpoint."[8]

We have a similar Husserlian formulation from Gail Soffer,

> *"Phenomenology is the descriptive but eidetic study of noetic-noematic correlations displayed by transcendental (bracketed) consciousness. . . . all positing of worldly reality is suspended, and the investigation is limited to an immanent specification of the meaning structures taken purely as phenomena."*[9]

The basic difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is that the latter does not maintain the notion of a transcendental subject. This revised stance helps to turn his phenomenology from the 'epistemological' to the 'existential.' This existentialism provides us with a freedom which, through language, gives us the capacity to refuse, to question, and to doubt, and thus endows us with the possibility of changing some aspects of our essential nature. This turn to an existential philosophy is due in large part to the impossibility of the *epoche'*[10] for those who followed in the phenomenological method, at least in the way that it was formulated by Husserl.

> *"The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl is constantly re-examining the possibility of the reduction. If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since ... we are in the world ... there is no thought which embraces all our thought."*[11]

In reference to this project of 'bracketing the natural attitude' and the possibility of its accomplishment, Eugen Fink states that the *"phenomenological reduction presupposes itself. This means that we can never bracket 'all' prejudices, ...[but we must] already have the transcendental insight that the Being of the World as a whole (including therefore my own human being) is a*

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[8] Maurita Harney, *Intentionality, Sense, and the Mind*; p. 145.

[9] Gail Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*; p. 120.

[10] The Husserlian *epoche'* or reduction is the conscious effort to reduce the consciousness to the experience of pure phenomena, which includes those conscious acts (phenomenal) themselves. In order to do this cognitive shift a person must suspend belief in (bracket) all metaphysical concepts of the natural attitude (e.g. objects, beings, etc.) and also bracket the relations to the ego.

[11] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xiv.

'prejudice'..."[12] For a phenomenology like that of Merleau-Ponty, as well as Sartre and others, subject and world are inseparable in existence.

Since Rene Descartes argued for the epistemic certainty of the "I am" and the "I think," most of Western philosophy has been involved in one way or another with the supporting, disproving, rejecting, accepting, or reinventing the Meditations. Descartes' role as postmodern's "fall guy" is the latest evidence of how deeply his thought informed the human intellectual community at a very crucial time in our history. We often refer to the Cartesian era (1650) as the beginning of Modern thought, the enlightenment, but not only because of the works of the French mathematician/philosopher, who, some think, largely borrowed and remodelled century-old ideas to speak to the emerging revolution of science. Descartes' work is one element in a radical shift in the history of ideas towards secularism and against the prevailing theological teleology. Edmund Husserl (an epistemologist with some Cartesian perspectives) stands at some crucial juncture of Modernism: for some as a completion and for others as the final failure. His work lays down the essential ground for the emergence of postmodern ideas in Heidegger and in the French Existentialists. Husserl was strongly influenced by Descartes and others (through the work of Franz Brentano) and less dramatically so by Kant and Hegel.

It might be claimed that it is in fact Hegel who reaches the turning point of Modernism. He may have looked "prophetically" into the great linguistic chasm of postmodernism as it lay exposed before him,

652 *"Here again, then, we see language as the existence of Spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing* for others, *self-consciousness which* as such *is immediately* present, *and as this self-consciousness is universal. ...It perceives itself just as it is perceived by others, and the perceiving is just* existence which has become a self."

653 *"The content which language has here acquired is no longer the perverted, and perverting and distracting, self of the world of culture; on the contrary: it is the* Spirit *that has returned into itself, is certain of itself, and certain in itself of its truth, or of its own recognition [of that truth], and which is acknowledged as knowing it. ...existence and the* self *stand as yet only in an external relation to each*

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[12] Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*; p. 36.

other. Language, however, only emerges as the middle term, mediating between independent and acknowledged self-consciousness; and the existent self *is immediately universal acknowledgement, an acknowledgement on the part of many, and in this manifoldness a simple acknowledgement. The content of the language of conscience is the* self that knows itself as essential being."[13]

In this meditation, unlike the Cartesian original[14], the "I think" and the "I am" are properly mediated by language, although by a language devoid of the perverting content of culture (contra-postmodernism). Hegel was not only one of the original philosophers of self-consciousness, but he was also one of the first of the moderns to give a priority to a purely phenomenological analysis of being.

---Husserl and Intentionality---

As a post-Hegelian, and a post-Darwinian, Husserl stood upon a different plateau as one of the new breed of truly secular modern philosophers. Husserl no longer saw the philosophical landscape as that of the struggle between science and God. He saw it as essentially a struggle between the natural sciences and the nature of human beings; ultimately therefore, as a dialectic between conceptual (linguistic) activity and perceptual intuition playing out upon the living terrain of meaning (noema).

The history of dualism can be traced back to before the Greeks to some of the ancient cultures which already possessed a written text as the eternal struggle between *form* and *matter*. We can also see it manifesting itself diversely since then as that confrontation between

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[13] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*; trans. A. Miller, (p. 395)

[14] For a critical perspective on Descartes' neglect to account for the language of his meditations, see Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*,#1 sec 115; or Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 400-407: "Descartes and his reader begin *their* meditation in what is *already* a universe of discourse. He...as a philosopher, in a meditation purported to be thoroughgoing, never even mentions *language* as the *condition* of the reading of the *cogito*, nor overtly invites us to pass *from the idea* to the *practice of the cogito*, it is because we take the process of expression for granted, because it figures among our acquisitions."; Karl-Otto Apel in *After Philosophy*, p. 276-281; Paul Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*; p. 11.

time and *space*, *mind* and *body*, *non-being* and *being*, and in some round-about way to that of the *concepts of language* and *perception*.

Brentano's Thesis of Intentionality sets the struggle as one between *mental phenomena* and *physical phenomena* within a theory of consciousness. In Brentano's Cartesianism - all "*objects of thought are immanent to the act of thinking.*"[15] His is a *descriptive psychology* which attempts to make the crucial distinction between those intentional phenomena directed to the "inner" realm versus those directed towards the "outer" realm. The difference is in the nature of the directedness of consciousness, namely, "*no physical phenomena manifests anything like intentionality.*"[16] This means that the way that we are conscious of mental phenomena (intentional, 'in-existent') is quite radically different from our consciousness of material phenomena (actual, existent). On Brentano's account, perception plays the mediating role in consciousness as "*an epistemological gap between internal and material objects.*"[17] Thus the word "perceives" can be used either materially or intentionally as in the perceiving of a physical object or of an emotional need.

Husserl takes over Brentano's notion concerning the importance of intentionality, which basically states that "*every consciousness is the consciousness of something.*"[18] It is impossible to begin any legitimate philosophical project with the notion that "there is nothing that it is like to be conscious," yet many intellectual inquiries see this statement as a merely irrelevant point. But it is difficult and finally deceptive and dangerous to discount the fact

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[15] Harney, *Intentionality, Sense, and the Mind*; p. 15.

[16] Ibid.; p. 30.

[17] Ibid.; p. 107.

[18] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xvii, 5.

that their own philosophical investigation is intentionally directed. For Husserl, it is precisely this abandonment of intentionality within science which leads to the social and ethical discord which we are experiencing (1936) in the world.[19]

For Husserl, a "*...theory of the intentionality of consciousness is to be understood on the model of a semantic relation.*"[20] Here he radically diverges from Brentano's subjectivism based inherently upon a Cartesian notion of mind as an active 'substance' metaphysically distinct from matter. Husserl's semantic theory is based on a perceptual trichotomy made up of

- **act** (intention) - **noema** (meaning) - **object** (of intuition).

Husserl refuses to make any extra-phenomenal ontological commitments in his appeal directly to the phenomenal in his famous 'reduction.'

Fink claims that Husserl describes two unique types of intentionality and a third, generative one; *1) psychical, 2) transcendental act*, and *3) transcendental constitutive* (productive or creative).[21] Husserl, via Fink, describes the first one as 'receptive intentionality' ("*...as the manner in which man is in the world.*"[22]), and the second as being of an 'indeterminate nature' (as the intentionality of the reduction). The third is a very special case of some combination or transformative movement between the first two. Fink adds, "*We do not mean to signify different intentionalities with these different concepts, but only one intentional life viewed at different levels.*"[23]

In his descriptions of Husserl's *noema*, Fink offers us two distinct types, "*the transcendental noema is the world itself viewed as the unity of acceptances contained within the belief*

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[19] A major part of his thesis in *The Crisis in the European Sciences*.

[20] Harney; A quote from Olafson, 1975 (p. 145).

[21] Eugen Fink, *Husserl's Philosophy & Contemporary Criticism*; from *The Phenomenology of Husserl: Selected Critical Readings*, edited by R. Elveton; p. 134.

[22] Ibid.; p. 123.

[23] Ibid.; p. 124.

which belongs to transcendental subjectivity's flowing world apperception,"[24] and "*psychological noema refers to an object which is independent of it and which announces and exhibits itself within this noema.*"[25] So the former is the being itself, as object of an intention, while the latter is "*that meaning of experience through which the object is made accessible ... the fulfilling identification of this object.*"[26] If this may yet be unclear, suffice to say that Fink, Husserl's most admired student, states that in *Ideas II*, Husserl himself "*does not give a thorough discussion of the difference between the psychological and the transcendental noemata.*"[27] For the purposes of this paper, I shall not attempt to make this picture any clearer, if that is even possible. We can rest assured that *noemata* of either type are phenomenal fulfilments of certain acts of intentionality.

In the latter part of the same Fink article are contained some references to the opaqueness of phenomenology for the comprehension of those persons in the natural attitude. We are then informed about the 'paradox of human subjectivity' as being both "*an object* within *the world and a subject which* constitutes *the world.*"[28] Two aspects of this paradox concern language, because in the activity of the *epoche'* the 'onlooker' must bracket the 'natural attitude' and yet it is only through this same 'natural attitude' that linguistic communication or conceptual thought can proceed. To correct this aspect, as well as the paradox of articulating a phenomenological statement, Husserl claims that "*in order to understand phenomenology, we must presuppose that one has developed the 'transcendental attitude.'*"[29] The problem for Husserl, as I see it, concerns the exact interplay among the transcendental ego, a

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[24] Ibid., p. 124.

[25] Ibid., p. 125.

[26] Ibid., p. 125.

[27] Ibid., p. 124.

[28] Ibid., p. 147.

[29] Ibid.; p. 143.

language, the reduction, and the meaning; somehow these four are not easy to incorporate into a fluent philosophy.[30]

So in speaking, the phenomenologist must assume the role of a linguistic subject when, e.g., as Harney suggests, he wants to articulate a conceptual intention rather than a perceptual one. A conceptual intention is "*...an immanently directed act ... in which the object is given non-perspectivally.*"[31] We can see here that the object of a purely conceptual act of intentionality will be an immanent 'thing'. Has the break from Brentano actually been effectively made? Is this sort of immanent meaning any different from the special category Brentano called "mental phenomena?" These non-perspectival objects are not sensually and perceptually intuited, but rather, they are conceptual or (by extension) linguistic entities. In their noematic structure these might be better described as psychological noema, and therefore for Husserl, ideas or opinions aimed at or about 'things.' But in any case, the intentional act is always phenomenal, and after all, these linguistic concepts are ultimately derived from some kind of perceptual experiences. Intentionality and the phenomenal realm are crucially linked. The intentional act is phenomenal; it is essential to a conscious experience of something. All consciousness is phenomenal, even though its source may not be so.

However, Husserl would have to balance the statement made above by Harney on his

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[30] Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: idea of a transcendental theory of method*; with textual notations by Husserl, trans. by Ronald Bruzina; (Indiana University Press, 1995).

"*Language arises in the natural attitude, ...that language has its home in the natural attitude is given expression in this common basic trait of all languages, namely, that all* concepts *are* concepts of being." (p. 85) Fink then goes on to say that although "*through the phenomenological reduction, the I indeed loses its natural-attitude restrictedness ... it does not lose its language.*" In his more detailed descriptions of the retention of language through the phenomenological reduction as a 'habituality' he adds, "*...inasmuch as in taking over language the phenomenologizing onlooker transforms its natural sense as referring to what is existent. If this kind of transformation did not occur, then the phenomenologist would slip out of the transcendental attitude with every word he spoke.*" (p. 86) So, it seems, there is a way to speak while in the activity of the *epoche* even though the process appears most difficult to accomplish. It requires the adoption of a transcendental attitude as well as a presupposition of the possibility of the phenomenological reduction. (p. 36)

[31] Harney; (p. 151).

behalf with the following, *"a transcendently directed act is one in which the object is given perspectivally."* It seems, at first glance that on Husserl's thesis, the phenomenal is more clearly perceptual, while the intentional is mostly conceptual or psychological. But that would be a misreading, because perception is also directed (intentional) while the conscious act is also phenomenal (in verbal or thoughtful language use). We must remember that Husserl maintains a reluctant version of dualism in spite of his closeness to a phenomenological monism. Although he rejects the Cartesian belief in a 'thinking thing' *"...it is certain that I, [that is, my mind, by which I am what I am], is entirely and truly distinct from my body, and may exist without it,"*[32] he does still retain the notion of a transcendental ego capable of producing activity in the phenomenal realm, (a perceiving thing?). Husserl was not an existential phenomenologist. He held on to this vague notion of a transcendental ego; but no longer as a Cartesian mental substance, nor as a Kantian constituting consciousness made up of rational and unifying faculties.

In order for Husserl to solve *"...the problem of being in the language of 'being-in-the-world' ... he gradually developed ... an ontology of the Lebenswelt."*[33] In his attempt to give an account of the phenomenal aspect of language, Husserl brought in the notion of a lifeworld (Lebenswelt). It was through the structure of the lifeworld, as the cultural language, that phenomenal beings through the acts and existence of their transcendental egos were somehow both transcendently *and* immanently inter-connected via noemata (meanings).

---Husserl and Meaning---

Meaning became the central issue, *"the return to experience of Husserl's phenomenology ... is based on the 'transcendental turn' away from the transcendent world of 'natural things' to our*

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[32] Rene Descartes, *The Meditations and Selections from the Principles of Rene Descartes*; trans. by J. Veitch; (1950) p. 91.

[33] James Edie, *Speaking and Meaning*; p. 7.

experience of the meaning of such realities. ...this transcendental attitude reveals a new and deeper sense of reality."[34] Husserl's theory of meaning is closely bound up with his thesis on the intentionality of consciousness. In all conscious acts some object is intended; this again rests on the necessary condition that "*every consciousness is a consciousness of something.*" Every act of some transcendental ego is aimed at or directed towards some object, without both the act and its object there would simply be no such thing as consciousness. In order to explicate the notion of meaning on his schema, Husserl appeals to a version of 'intuition.' In his sense, intuition is not like an intuitive hunch or some vague feeling of sensibility. Intuition is phenomenal experience, neither pure imagination nor pure perception, but rather a thorough combination of these two. It seems that instead of allowing, as Brentano does, for "inner" phenomena (mental) and "outer" phenomena (physical) as two distinct forms of consciousness, Husserl simply collapses the two into one and calls that phenomenon 'meaning.' The 'act' takes the place of the inner, while the perceived 'intuition' replaces the outer. In order to be meaningfully conscious of something like a *'table'*, both act and intuition must overlap, yet in order to be cognizant of *'desire'* there must be a similar overlapping which makes the experience meaningful. On the context of the latter, Paul Ricoeur states things clearly,

> "*Mental states of volition, of need, of affectivity are clearly intentionally structured in terms of objects, even though these states may be partially or wholly 'unconscious'. An unconscious desire or an unconscious hatred is not for that reason an objectless desire or an objectless hatred.*"[35]

Thus both the activity and the perceived intuition must be somehow present in all instances of meaning. This is a phenomenal activity/being which is both inner and outer at once, but yet essentially neither.

Husserl also has a thesis on our "non-objectivating acts" of intentionality. In a

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[34] Ibid.; p. 3.

[35] Ibid.; p. 16.

movement which points beyond the structural rules of syntax, we can reach *"toward the things in the world to which our meanings apply."*[36] In these sorts of "non-objectivating" acts, *"language is the means by which we address ourselves to others and express our moods, feelings, desires, etc.."*[37] This meaning, as well as the more object-directed noema, is normally rather 'blurred' by both the intentional activity of the transcendental ego and its objective commitment to the existence of transcendent objects. But beneath this sort of overlapping extra-phenomenal existence of the immanent source of activity and its conceptually posited, transcendent objects there exists a clear and pure experience of phenomena which is for Husserl the meaning (noema): intention, fully-filled by intuition.

It is perhaps necessary to make a further point here concerning the notion of pure linguistic meaning. Husserl does acknowledge that *"there are purely phonological and syntactical levels of meaning, [but] these are not sufficient to account for meaning."*[38] In the analysis of the meanings of sentences on their own, a different level of differentiation must be employed. There is a meaning-world which we, as meaning-making beings, live in, but to import that lifeworld into the strict syntactical aspect of linguistic meaning is an error. *"This meaning [linguistic] must be distinguished from my own psychological acts which accompany its expression; my sentences may convey my inner psychological states to another but they do not* ***mean*** *them,"*[39] simply because that same sentence can be expressed when I am in a different mood and yet have the same linguistic meaning. So the act of expressing a sentence or any of its subsequent effects,

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[36] Ibid.; p. 137.

[37] Ibid.; p. 137.

[38] Ibid.; p. 141.

[39] Ibid.; p. 141.

does not play into this purely linguistic aspect of meaning, but this aspect certainly must be taken into account in any intentional analysis of *meaning* in the larger context.

My own (non-Husserlian) interpretation of these 'things,' *ego* as the source of activity and *'posited objects,'* is that they are merely the linguistically distilled *concepts* of pure phenomenal being and are aspects of the adoption of a natural attitude, which is required for the emergence of a language. It seems to me (perhaps naively) that Husserl, to begin with, believes in the existence of some 'experience' *called* the transcendental ego. However, his being stuck within a language (which sustains a belief for him in transcendent objects and relations - 'the natural attitude'), he then tries to remove these linguistically constituted beliefs by way of a 'reduction' through which he hopes that he can ultimately experience the transcendental life of that ego in pure phenomena. In presupposing the reduction (to a transcendental ego) by bracketing the natural attitude, it seems to me that we and he are caught within an unnecessary circle. Our intention is to get beyond language (natural attitude) yet the place where we are going - the experience of the pure ego as active in the phenomenal realm - is itself, as ego, merely a linguistic entity. It seems that ultimately one must believe in it before one can 'see' or experience phenomena through the ego; that only by the positing of such a belief does the *epoche'* stand a chance of succeeding. The problem, which Merleau-Ponty solves, is to eliminate the metaphysical linguistic commitments of subjectivity without positing a linguistic subject (transcendental ego) to accomplish the task.

The concepts of ego and supposed objects arise through the existent nature of consciousness, "*every consciousness is a consciousness of something.*" Husserl explicitly states that metaphysical (I would rather call them extra-phenomenal) existences are to be suspended in belief right from the start. All that to which we can commit ourselves is to some sort of pure (reduced) experience, everything else is an interpretation and hence already at some distance from such real phenomenal being.

Husserl's famous phenomenological reduction or *epoche'* is what I see as his attempt to

somehow linguistically describe *the way* to the experience of pure phenomena. His approach is rather clinical and quite unlike other such similar attempts in Buddhism (through meditation) and Daoism (through the embracing of linguistic paradoxes). Although unlike Descartes in his famous meditations, Husserl acknowledges and tries to give a suitable account of language within his phenomenology, yet we never know if it is the very language that we are using which prevents our attempts at the reduction from actually succeeding.

Phenomenology has not yet sufficiently impacted upon postmodernism, but when it does, it appears that both modernism and postmodernism must somehow be preserved and simultaneously surpassed within a new and living philosophy of presence. Perhaps it is through the works of Ricoeur and his renewed interest in the body as being essential to linguistic consciousness that the postmodernist fascination with a subject-less perspective shall be broken. It seems to me that the work of Merleau-Ponty has yet to be fully appreciated in this regard, as well as his and other's theses on engagement, reflection and perception, all of which are derived from phenomenological investigations.

We shall investigate further some of Merleau-Ponty's interpretations of Husserl's concerns with intentionality, meaning, intersubjectivity, experience, sensuality and perception in the later chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MEANING IN PERCEPTION

"Whatever the subtle changes of meaning which have ultimately brought us, as a linguistic acquisition, the word and the concept of consciousness, we enjoy direct access to what it designates. For we have the experience of ourselves, of that consciousness which we are, and it is on the basis of this experience that all linguistic connotations are assessed, and precisely through it that language comes to have any meaning at all for us. ...Jean Wahl is therefore wrong in saying that 'Husserl separates essences from existence'. The separated essences are those of language. It is the office of language to cause essences to exist in a state of separation which is in fact merely apparent, since through language they still rest upon the ante-predicative life of consciousness. In the silence of primary consciousness can be seen appearing not only what words mean, but also what things mean: the core of primary meaning round which the acts of naming and expression take place."

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty[40]

It appears that Husserl's project was essentially an innovative attempt to give a phenomenology of perception. However, his was not just a transcendental analysis, but rather a project of active reduction: a reduction of consciousness to the experience of phenomenal being or perceptual meaning. Now perhaps that undertaking is not impossible, given some sort of conceptual Gestalt shifts involving one's semantic commitments to foregrounds and backgrounds, but there does seem to be a crucial step missing. How can one reduce intellectual experience to perceptual experience without first knowing what is the precise difference between the two? In the context of a Modernist concept of consciousness, as the activity of a 'subject in its relation to an object' (a linguistic structure), how is it possible to "overcome epistemology"[41] without somehow destroying that accepted notion of consciousness in the process? It seems that in order to fulfil the Modernist project, we must first of all enter into some kind of Postmodernist (subject-less) perspective (i.e. as a complete

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[40] *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xv.

[41] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*.

commitment to either an objective or linguistic science). Yet once that move is accomplished then the next required move into the phenomenology of pure perception is also lost. Derrida in fact claims that there is no such thing as perception, "*Perception is precisely a concept ... a given originating from the thing itself ... in its meaning; independently from language ... I don't believe there is any perception.*"[42] In fact we cannot even get back to the notion of experience, "*Derridean deconstruction ... does not make room for experience, but rather remains fully within the language of the deconstruction.*"[43]

---Merleau-Ponty's Intentionality---

Here, at the brink of the total rejection of the subject, we can insert the life-philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. What is the difference between either an intellectual or an empirical account of perception and a phenomenological account? For an intellectual account we might look at Kant's three critiques, while the empirical version can be found in any one of the many non-self-conscious philosophies of the Anglo-American tradition. Merleau-Ponty was deeply suspicious of what he called intellectualism (any philosophy which dogmatically privileged rational concepts) and also of empiricism (an a-subjective, a-historical, representational materialism). Both of these traditions might, in turn, criticize a phenomenology of perception on the grounds that it is impossible to give a non-intellectualized account of perception or a non-psychologized one. Such dismissals, however, both come from a philosophy with an ultimate commitment to meaning being not in phenomena (as in Husserl), but in language or concepts or theories. An intellectualist would say that there is no such thing as meaningful experience in pre-intellectual being, while a contemporary empiricist would maintain that only

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[42] Jacques Derrida, *Structure, Signs and Play*; p. 272; as quoted in *Myth, Truth and Literature*, Colin Falck; p. 20.

[43] M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*; p. 123.

scientifically founded meaning is free of subjective interference. Merleau-Ponty takes the position that both of these perspectives are prejudiced and incorrect.[44]

Merleau-Ponty offers us a solution. If we can give a meaningful phenomenological account of perception, then we can show that there is meaningful experience which need not have been pre-conceived artificially. Such an account would simply describe a "being-in-the-world" as an experience that one need only perceptualize, in active doing or being. Language is required only to show in concepts that which one can actually feel existentially. And then one can then simply go and meaningfully experience the feeling.

Here, I must warn the reader that this sort of deliberate agenda is nowhere explicitly articulated in Merleau-Ponty's works, but many times alluded to and referred to in other ways.[45] The *Phenomenology of Perception* provides the reader with adequate evidence of the nature of his project which should confirm that the directive of the above paragraph is implicitly there.

A phenomenological account of perception, as eloquently described by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, should open up in the reader an intellectual space in which one can perceive the phenomenal world in immediate, living experience. In keeping with the basic concerns of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty begins by examining the nature of intentionality - that something must always be given as an object of a conscious act. Even a non-linguistic being, for example, an eight-month old baby, is a conscious being and a being who is able to cope with the world in some very fundamental and complex ways. How is the world of phenomena perceived by this child? Is this child an intentional being?

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[44] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 24, 36, 38, 39, 52, 54, 55, 142, 177, etc..

[45] For example, in Ibid., on page 49, he describes perception as 'wordless logic'; on page 131, he talks about perception as 'living means', then on page 227 he says that 'the natural unity of the perceiving subject is broken by science'.

We will first of all need to investigate the parameters of intentionality. Without delving too far into "animal psychology" or without delving into that domain at all, we can, from our intelligent, linguistic perspective conclude that every possibly conscious animal, one which exhibits some sort of oriented behaviour in the world, is at least minimally intentional. We can, with a fairly confident sense of interpretation, claim that a deer which attempts to jump over a fallen tree but fails, has experienced some sort of unfulfilled intention. It may be an open question as to whether a deer has a meaning-rich world of experience, but in the given example there must be 'something that it is like' for that deer to intend to jump over that tree and to then experience its failure, in the form of some pain or confusion or at least a temporary disorientation. This sort of intending may be very much absorbed within the activity itself. There is probably no reflection at an explicit level, but the deer would nevertheless experience something in the way of a lived-awareness in consequence of its failure.

Now it may be that we are lapsing into subjectivism by transferring our own reflective experiences onto those of other creatures. It may in fact be virtually impossible, from our intelligent and linguistic perspective to say where inert-object mobility ends and intentional activity begins. In fact some causal theorists have as their explicit (intentional) project to show that human intentionality is a fully describable system of a purely causal order. The only conclusion that one might reasonably draw from the forgoing examples is that our linguistic and quantifying consciousness is so pervasive that we can see intentionality where there are apparently only inert objects. We are so much in the world, that we cannot help but see it as a mirror of our own conscious nature. As much as the world created us, we in turn re-create the world in our own image.

We can question whether conscious activity can be neatly segregated into the deliberately-driven stuff and the blind, causally-driven stuff. Husserl had two distinctive forms of intentionality which might apply here. One was the *"intentionality of act, which is that*

of our judgements and of those occasions when we voluntarily take up a position" and the other one was "*operative intentionality ... or that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, ... furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language.*"[46] Animals which live in social groups use both body and verbal gestures in order to communicate, but whether their worlds are explicitly meaningful in the sense of an operative intentionality, it is really not possible to prove or disprove. Instead of delving into the minds of unknowable creatures, for the purposes of this essay we need only describe the intentionality of our own orientations within the world and use Husserl's descriptions in a general sense as applying to any consciousness whatever.

Meaning, for Husserl, is the intentional act fulfilled by intuition as experienced through perceptive consciousness. Since it is impossible, in analysis, to step fully outside of our own language-laden experience, we will have to be content to 'measure' our perceptual experience by a direct appeal to our own meaningful world by way of the Husserlian perspective. Meaning cannot be implanted into some other perceptually experiencing being. Even at the intersubjective level, I cannot tell you what your meaningful world is, any more that I could understand the consciousness of a cat[47], or experience the operational functions of an amoeba. All the meanings that I have are mine, and ultimately mine alone, which does not rule out the possibility of sharing, expanding or changing these meanings in communication with others through language, gestures or behaviour.

Intentionality is relevant mainly to the conscious life through which it is actively expressed and just as it is impossible to deny its existence in any self-conscious human being, it may be similarly impossible to believe that any intention can be completely shared between two human subjects. Dialogue is such a sharing, but it is never the meaningful fusion of two

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[46] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xviii.

[47] "*This thesis has received, in its earlier stages, several 'comments' from a certain cat, whose response it can only be hoped was favourable.*"

into one; although every conversation must be the converging of two similar intentions into one publicly expressed meaningful event. Every human being is cognitively made up of a multitude of intentions of which one can never be perfectly isolated and shared integrally with another person. We shall talk in more detail about the phenomenon of shared-meanings when we examine 'lifeworlds' but first we shall investigate Merleau-Ponty's method of incarnating the subject within the notion of a lived-body.

---Phenomena as Experience---

Before we begin let me say a few words with reference to the essential difference between the living phenomenal experience of sensation/sense and the scientific account of 'sense-data experience'. First of all, science deals with static facts - notions such as "brain-states" or "sense-data experience" may be necessary for the scientifically quantified accounts, but in the real, phenomenal world no such temporal slices of real experience ever exist. "*Sense-content ... is always 'pregnant' with a meaning - as an organic relationship.*"[48] What in a phenomenological description must be directly experienced, is in science described as a measured and temporally sliced experience.[49] Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology requires that a person "livingly" and within reflection begin to "see the light of a visual experience" or "feel the particular tension of a tactile experience" or "hear the movement of the waves in an auditory experience" or "sense the balance and the coordinated orientation of the body in a physical activity" and even "intuit the intentionality of the other in a dialogue or in a sexual inter-experience." A science of comparative quantification based on measurements given according to some pre-determined standards, does none of these things directly. Yet indirectly

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[48] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 152.

[49] Ibid.; pp. 45, 208.

it is specifically tailored to be interpreted by living, phenomenal beings. Science is intersubjectively intentional, but it cannot be directly experienced as such (it is not at all like kissing).

As a last remark on this topic, let me say that science is one way to perceive a world, as an accurate, sophisticated, ultra-sensory, linguistic experience, but it can never replace the phenomenology of "*what it is like to be conscious of something.*"[50] Science itself does not displace the "Eureka!" of the living fulfilment of an intention; because the meaning must ultimately live, be it scientific or sexual. Science claims to be non-self-conscious in its dealings with objects, yet "*consciousness of an object necessarily involves a consciousness of itself.*"[51] Today, science, as a human interest, is learning to be reflective.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology is somehow the inverse of Husserl's. Both of them are concerned exclusively with the phenomenal realm, which is after all, where everything happens. However, the activity of Husserl's transcendental ego (which is as an 'ego' not a phenomenal entity, and which cannot even be described from the perspective of phenomenology) occurs in the phenomenal realm, as the acts of that conscious-ego. These acts include perceiving, and all of the emotional, imaginative, conceptual and linguistic activities. Intentionality emerges from Husserl's transcendental ego, but these acts somehow reach beyond the ego itself in its attempts to grasp meanings within the phenomenal realm of experience. "Objects" as the meaningful contents of conscious acts might be transcendent entities which do not, as such, exist in the phenomenal realm of experience and our commitment to the existence of these "objects" can at best be perceptually guaranteed. In the activity of the ego certain formal structures can be meaningfully extracted from the

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[50] Thomas Nagel, *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*; from Philosophical Review 83, No. 4 (Oct. 1974); p. 437.

[51] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 377.

phenomenal realm. In Husserl's phenomenological theory, meaning is an exclusively experienced, phenomenal event: 'an intention being fulfilled by intuition.' From this account we can easily move into the ontology of Merleau-Ponty. If we get rid of the notion of a transcendental ego as the source of immanent conscious acts and also get rid of the posited transcendent existence of physical objects (both being the essential 'projectives' of linguistic structure), we can reduce experience primarily to the perception of phenomena.

One might wonder, "How can we speak about perceptual meaning as Merleau-Ponty does in *The Phenomenology of Perception* given that we are using language to convey concepts which are 'beyond the reach' of language?" It should be answered that this can be accomplished by realizing, at the outset, that language is not just another form of pure perception, that it is not exclusively phenomenal as are most other meaningful experiences. *"Language forces us to break experiences up into qualities and sensations ..."*[52] Language is the 'phantom' existence of the other within the phenomenal self. *"Language transcends us and yet we speak it."*[53] Whenever the living being enters into a linguistic act, it tentatively leaves the phenomenal realm, or at least it distances itself from it and moves into a different *'meaning dimension'*. While it is engaged in speech or in thought, the phenomenal subject becomes partially transcendent. This subject can articulate in phenomenal expression its lived experiences through the 'unconscious' use of its language. This language should be completely meaningful for that phenomenal-self, but as soon as those meaning-laden words leave the speaker's lips they take on an indeterminate meaning-existence. Only when an understanding listener can reassemble these encoded symbols does the meaning once again come to life, however every subsequent re-interpretation of those transcendently meant and

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[52] Ibid.; p. 238.

[53] Ibid.; p. 392.

phenomenally expressed phrases will be somehow slightly changed in its lived-meaning content.

Merleau-Ponty nowhere states or even implies that he is articulating the universal structures of human perceptual experience which every human being must share. With respect to the intersubjectively transcendent nature of language, such an enterprise would surely be dubious and unfulfillable. Yet if one follows Merleau-Ponty, that is, accepts Husserl's account of meaning, and collapses his notion of a transcendental-ego, and the possible existence of transcendent "objects" into linguisticality itself, then, according to Merleau-Ponty, intentional appeal to the other in his description of the phenomenology of perception can be meaningfully apprehended by the reader through an intuitive access to his or her own lived-experience. If the reader shares some meaningful form of those perceptual experiences which Merleau-Ponty has articulated, then the reader will understand the phenomenological essence of meaningful perception.

Merleau-Ponty's language, in this phenomenological analysis, becomes like the probing light of the 'absent other' scanning the lived-memory of the reader. With his descriptive language, Merleau-Ponty hopes to help focus the reflective perception of the reader onto those very experiences which hold the meaning of perceptions never before conceptualized at the linguistic level. Let me speak of my own experiences of being immersed within the phenomenal realm of perception. When these meaning-structures are illuminated, it is not intended that the reader see Merleau-Ponty's conceptual point, but rather that the reader actually see in his own light, the real phenomenal experience. When the perceiving person truly begins to "see the light in a visual experience" and "feel the tension of a tactile experience" and "hear the movement," "sense the balance," and "feel the depth of being active" and "sense the interest of an intuitive curiosity in the self and in the other," only then does one experience living in the phenomenal realm. Only then does one realize that there is only one realm of experience. With the commitments of language focused into a point of nothingness,

(the force of one's concentration centered upon the quality of the sensual experience rather than upon the named objects or essences), then the once meaning-laden background of a linguistic existence in perception suddenly becomes the full and lively foreground of a phenomenal reality. And then, even the phenomenal-being himself seems to melt into the 'world' as if one's own separate and exclusive linguistic existence, the 'I', had suddenly been abolished, or at least temporarily banished from the foreground of perception.

It may be that Merleau-Ponty has very nearly succeeded in a revised 'descriptive' version of Husserl's *epoche'*, which simply is the phenomenology of perception. Merleau-Ponty conflated both "relational ego" and "apparent object," the specific targets to be bracketed in Husserl's reduction into the language itself. But he failed to locate Husserlian meaning in his bifurcated world of perception and language. Like Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty opted for the mystery of "silence" to fill the void between perceiving and speaking. And yet ironically, is "silence" not merely some unarticulated phenomenal experience?

"Don't you hear that screaming all around us - that screaming that men call silence?"[54]

---The Lived-Body---

The ghost of the Cartesian *cogito*, which some suppose was in its day already a mere 'ghost' of the Christian soul, still managed to infect the phenomenologies of the nineteenth century, functioning as the transcendental source and destination of meaning. While Husserl managed to reduce this 'mind' to the verge of nothing as a bare identity principle, those existentialists who followed him carried the reduction to its phenomenological end. Yet, Merleau-Ponty noted, even as 'nothingness' or 'non-being' this phantom of dualism refused to die. It lived as we spoke and then hid in "silence" and waited until the next utterance brought it fleetingly back to life. Merleau-Ponty turned the ontology of meaning inside-out and

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[54] Werner Herzog, *The Enigma of Kasper Hauser*; (1974, film).

instead of interring the secular subject (as some postmoderns have done), he brought it back to life. However, he brought it back to the fullness of a life which had been denied it for perhaps two and a half millennia in the West. Merleau-Ponty, in the style of an anti-intellectual Hegelian, swung the doors of subjectivity wide open and let the 'spirit' enter; not just through our rational acts, but through our emotional, sexual, and perceptual acts as well. Subjectivity merged with the phenomenal realm so completely that the two, essentially, became one.

The lived-body or body-subject is the result of the incarnation of mind in body. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty gives us several chapters describing the inherent meaningfulness of pre-reflective (spontaneously lived) perception. We live in meaning, even before we learn to speak a single word. Although we may not be able to explicitly reflect upon the meanings of our actions and on the behaviour of others, we live in the gestural meaning of our activities. Our bodies speak gesturally, even when we do not want them to. There is no such thing as a posture which is meaningless.[55]

Intentionality, which is how meaning comes into being, is life itself. *"...The purpose of life is life itself."*(Goethe)[56] *"The purpose of life is itself; the purpose of the struggle for liberty is the liberty here, today, of living individuals,..."*(Herzen)[57] As any living being reaches out to grasp some "thing" we have concrete evidence of a minimal form of intentionality. To alter that previous quotation so often used "every consciousness is a consciousness of something," we can claim, *"every spontaneous grasping-action is extended towards some thing."* This re-statement of

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[55] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 100-104.

[56] Wolfgang von Goethe, as quoted by Colin Falck, *Truth, Myth, and Literature*; p. 169.

[57] Alexander Herzen, who in fact mentions Goethe in that same paragraph, as quoted by Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*; p. 94.

intentionality echoes the words of Goethe and Herzen, that the aim of life is life itself. Surely even a blind and deaf person, without a language, grasping at the substances of her world is displaying a meaningful existence. And when she finally becomes literate she can say, *"I believe that life, not wealth, is the aim of existence..."*[58] Helen Keller states that before she learned to 'sign' she did not have a world (no reflection). Yet she can now recall gestures which were meaningful to her at that time. For example, the cupping of hands into a small egg-holding position meant 'the activity of gathering eggs'. As a conceptual and linguistic being, Keller could later relate to those 'meaningful mimes' which structured her 'rational activities,' but in her blind and deaf pre-reflective 'world,' she could not even question herself. That world was lived spontaneously, even though it was only later that she realized that it had in fact been minimally meaningful, although she acknowledgizes that just as often it was simply confusion. Meaning came in doing, in activity, in the directedness of her actions, but very quickly it could disintegrate into the madness of confusion.[59] Intentionality, in its most minimalist form, is the living grasp of life itself. One cannot draw a line to demarcate where, in the process of life, conscious activity begins. Life itself is *"pregnant with meaning."*

For the sake of a better understanding of the conscious-body, we can briefly reiterate Merleau-Ponty's account of how we, as embodied-subjects, come to orient ourselves to the 'space' of our active extensional existence. From our linguistically contrived existences, we often assume that the notion of 'space' is a concept that we derive from the action of a mind in order to give a coherent structure to experience. This sort of intellectual perspective is dismissed by Merleau-Ponty. For him, sensed 'space' is a lived-experience; not within our conceptual consciousness, but more primitively in our perceptual activity. We consciously feel

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[58] Helen Keller, *The Open Door*; p. 67.

[59] Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*; (1902)

space directly as we feel the motions of our bodies in the world. We orient ourselves to our perceptions of the world. Directions such as 'up' and 'down' are neither the way that our bodies are (our feet can be up and our heads down), nor the way that the world is (we can become disoriented even while the sky and ground have not shifted their axis in relation to our bodies). Rather, these directions are the lived relations between our bodies and the world. It is a whole complex network of relations which constitute this orientation: physiology, gravity, psychology, mobility, horizon, physical geometry, and others. Merleau-Ponty points out that our perception of 'space' is articulated through our life-activity. There is some sense of balance in the dynamic of being where we find our spatial orientation.[60]

The lived-body is the way that the perceiving being finds its way in the world. This is how all of our senses - I would include on Merleau-Ponty's behalf, balance, depth, interest, etc. - are livingly experienced. These multiple senses overlap and interweave in their sensual occurings to inform our grasp of a complete world. But even more importantly, it is a perspective which has some implicit sense of itself; an understanding of one's primary "*being-in-the-world*" which has a 'yes' and a 'no'. We, as lived bodies, are either well oriented, disoriented, or some combination of the two. We are sensible to pleasure and pain. As bodies, we are cognizant of our primordial orientation before we can speak; before we can know in reflection.[61]

Articulating is not everything. Merleau-Ponty thinks that it is in the meaning of the articulation where everything properly exists. Meaning is in the activity of using the words and only symbolically in the words themselves. The living, conscious-body is the source of the activity and therefore it is both the source and the destination of the meaning. To the

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[60] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; pp. 103-106. Also see Charles Taylor's *Philosophical Arguments*; pp. 22-25.

[61] Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*; pp. 117-118.

"*hand touching and being touched*" and to the "*seeing and being seen*," we can add, "the *meaning* and the *being meant*." In a re-working of Sartre's famous, "We are condemned to freedom!" Merleau-Ponty responds with "*We are condemned to meaning.*"[62] In the same way that my two hands touching one another is the active and phenomenal unity of my body, we can also say that when I am thinking about those hands-in-contact, "the *meaning* is the *being* meant." For Merleau-Ponty, we are meaning itself.

But what of intersubjective communication, what of the dialectic of my hand touching your hand? Does, for Merleau-Ponty, the meaning of that gesture transcend the conscious-bodies of the ones and articulate the unity of the two? Are we condemned also to share our meanings, or is it that through such intimate intersubjective contact that our condemnation to self-imposed 'immanent' meaning ends? Do we transcend ourselves when we communicate? When my intentionality overlaps with your intentionality and we find agreement or we fulfil our joint purposes, have we created a new and transcendently-directed meaning? In order to investigate these questions we will have to first explicate Merleau-Ponty's notion of "lived-experience" and how it correlates with his unique concept of 'time', a combination of elements borrowed from Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger.

---The Temporal Nature of Language---

Husserl was one in the line of philosophers to suggest that "inner phenomena" must accompany all phenomenal perceptions, in order that those perceptions be meaningfully cognized. After all, how could you have a perception of any "thing" if that sensory experience did not match some conceptualized intention. Of course those conceptualized acts (immanent) were themselves ultimately derived from past phenomenal perceptions, built up incrementally upon the 'logic of the senses'.

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[62] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xix.

The problems of intellectual accounts of perception can be avoided, because phenomenological experience is living, whereas those who begin with conceptions (innate or otherwise) are trying to apply dead concepts to living perceivers, thus they find themselves confounded as to the origins of 'thought'. As soon as the investigater brings the analysis back to life, the problems of explaining origins largely disappear.

Merleau-Ponty takes the conceptual-perceptual intermingling a step beyond. It is through our lived experience of space perceived through our body-activity in the world that we achieve 'depth' perception.[63] What depth perception ultimately amounts to, even in our perception of an object, is our ability to absently perceive that same object on behalf of all the other locations surrounding it. When I look at a chair, it is given to me perspectivally, and that is how I perceive it. Yet along with this actual perception, I can take up the perspectives of the room itself or of other objects in the room and obtain a non-perspectival conception of the chair which blends with the perceptually given one. *"I do not so much perceive objects as reckon with an environment..."*[64] Brentano's "inner" and "outer" phenomena have now become something like a 'background' and 'foreground'. We perceive objects in the way that we do only because of complex interrelations between our senses of perception, focusing, actively being in a certain perceptual space, remembering, intending, and even taking up some positions absently as if the table could see the chair, as if the corner could see the chair. It becomes almost impossible to perceptually separate the self from the 'world'.

"What gives the weight, the thickness, the flesh of each color, each sound, each tactile texture, of the present, and of the world is the fact that he who grasps them feels himself emerge from them. ...the sensible ... is an extension of his flesh. The space, the time of the things are shreds of himself, ... I experience their solidity from within insofar as I am among them and insofar as they communicate

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[63] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 256. Also discussed in his essay *The Eye and the Mind*; from *The Primacy of Perception.*

[64] Ibid.; p. 416.

through me as a sentient thing."[65]

In this absent-sense the perceiver apprehends some object as if he was present like a phantom, everywhere around and through the object. The perceiver cannot see the 'back-side' of the chair, but as perceivers we apprehend the object through the mirror of the world, a cognitive mirror which is our own lived-space. Thus even though we cannot perceive the chair's 'back-side' we apprehend it full in depth because our invisible eyes are in the table and the plant and the desk and, even as this 'phantom lived-space,' in the wood and cloth of the chair. Our lived-body as extended in space, takes up the body of the chair and we come to know its fullness.

The lived-body has given us a glimpse of how perceptual meaning is latent in all human activity. Meaning does not somehow magically appear with the acquisition of a language. The great advantage of language is that it gives us a capacity to name the experiences of our lived-bodies, and therefore, to articulate our lived-meanings in some cases even before we can produce or fulfil those meaningful activities or intentions in the phenomenal world. Language takes the time, that would normally be required to express ourselves meaningfully in the world through the actions of our bodies and compresses that time into the symbolism of signs. For example, the mother can say to her linguistic three year old, "Please close that door behind you!" and the child can fulfil that intersubjective intention with a meaningful act of door-closure. That same mother could not even expect a similar transcendent-sharing of meaning with her one year old. In effect, the words and their meaningful content are like a piece of meaning-time being thrown across a room to another person through whom an intention can be fulfilled without the mother having to carry out those activities herself in bodily-terms.

Language gives us this remarkable capacity which enables us to save and predict time.

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[65] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*; p. 114.

Linguistic beings need not be trapped within a permanent present, but have the capacity to transcend themselves. In his discussion of the cognitive transformation of the human being from the 'sensuous' to the 'formal' (linguistic), Schiller makes a similar reference to temporality, "*[w]hen the formal impulse holds sway ... man has risen to a* unit of idea *embracing the whole realm of phenomena. By this operation we are no more in time, but time, with its complete and infinite succession, is in us.*"[46] This time-saving aspect is accomplished by saving-the-meaning, which is essentially to act in absence, to pretend, to articulate, to perform in a play, or to express a probable lived-experience.

Now multiply this time-saving capacity of language-usage by the meaningful potentiality of a complete language and also by the multitudes of language-users, each of whom has the capability of fulfilling intentions they have hardly dreamed about, and you will know the exponential meaning of time^2, (subjective time x objective time?). The lifeworld is not merely some articulated version of a dynamic, but meaningful presence, it is the articulated lived-experiences of our cultural history transported by the meaning-time of language into an intersubjective and transcendent reality. And we must also acknowledge that as we bring more and more of our historical past into the present through our language, we also bring our future closer and closer to the present, until finally, we may seem to understand everything.

When our linguistic transcendence was largely mythical in the form of stories about gods and spirits, our future loomed before us with the heaviness of a time we could scarcely comprehend. But even then, the future was seemingly accounted for by the mythology of the past brought into a present. As strange as that past was, so too was the future. When we finally know our past, what will it do to our future? Language has given us a consciousness of time, but it cannot inform our future, except to bring it into our present.

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[46] Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man;* (Twelfth Letter) p. 67.

---The Temporal Nature of Lived-Experience---

The lived-experience is the lived-body temporalized. Every lived-body experience, both well oriented, disoriented or of finding or losing orientation, is not an experience which merely happens and then disappears. Every lived-body experience as it occurs, restructures the very nature of the being. All past experiences will continue to live in the body-subject as the presently felt echoes of past phenomenal encounters within the world. *"...if we follow time as we live it, the present still touches the past and holds the past in its hand."*[67] These memories are not pictures, or images, or brain-state files, but rather they are continuously living and informing the conscious-body in all of its subsequent actions, feelings and intentions.

The living nature of our nervous-system is affected by each moment of sensory perception. In the same way that the living nature of perceptual space continuously informs our very being even before we have a language, so too do all other experiences. A child who can walk around the room without difficulty has mastered the perception of space, as well as many, many other skills and behaviours: crawling, walking, clapping, biting, throwing, jumping, and even emotional expressions like laughing, crying, playing, desiring, needing, and others. The pre-linguistic child is a very complex being.

What does it amount to, to say that each lived-experience continues to live within our conscious present? Through what form or structure would such experiences maintain a presence in our psychological being?

Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, adopts a notion of time which will serve us well in explaining how lived-experiences are never passed, how they remain as the living structures of our present awareness. Three aspects will be discussed here: first of all, the nature of time in consciousness; second, the affects of all sensual encounters within the

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[67] Merleau-Ponty, *Prose of the World*; p. 151.

phenomenal realm; and third, the importance of 'first experiences' in establishing the perceptual content of meaning.

Time is not what it appears to be for the naive consciousness.[68] There are no moments which happen like the ticks of the second-hand on a watch and then recede into history. Human consciousness perceives time this way because that is the structure of a linguistically competent consciousness itself. Every phenomenal event has its own unique temporal existence. For example, that chair does not exist in a continuous chain of moments like the frames of a movie film. The chair, as that particular configuration of molecules began its unique time when it was constructed and shall remain "in-presence" until it is destroyed. I may have many separate perceptual encounters with that inert chair, but those are my own conscious, perceptual "presence-events" and not the chair's at all. One may try to counter this seemingly even more naive temporal view by pointing out that the chair will change over its lifetime. "When I saw it last year it was a different chair from what it is today. It now has several scratches on it and one of the brass tacks has disappeared. So the chair, like my consciousness, has moments that recede into its history and it is not merely one ever-present presence."

That point is well taken, but it is a bit misleading. The chair did once exist in a past in which it was less scratched and still had all of its tacks, that much is true, but it is true only in your own conscious remembrance of those previous moments of existence. Those moments are not the chair's moments, but your own perceptual instances of awareness. The chair is still inert and whatever past it has had has not receded into its history, but rather that past exists within the formal configuration of its lingering presence. Those incidences or actions by others which scratched off some paint are not passed as far as the chair is involved, they are present in the physical evidence of its present formal condition. Those scratching-events

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[68] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 428.

belong to someone else's time or have been dispersed as traces of motion in the phenomenal realm which are no longer recoverable, but whatever is recoverable has not passed and is quite evident in the present condition of the chair.

A conscious notion of temporal presence depends on change in order for it to be a meaningful time, but a 'material' notion of presence (which we must be willing to give back to material-being) is dependent upon identity or sameness. So, the changes which happen to the chair's identity must be continuously evident in the presence of its identity. "For the chair," the past of its identity is always present - time, for the chair, never passes, it simply exists in the present identity of its being. Its time is its formal quality; when the chair is crushed beyond recognition, then its time is essentially over.

Now it may be difficult to see this point, but the fact must be clear that whatever past I impute to that chair's existence, is *always* my past only. In the real world the chair is present as manifestly containing its past within it. If you look closely at one of the scratches, which you remember having caused, there is your own past visible in the present as a chair's presence. If it was once kicked by someone or thrown across some other room, those very pasts which actually can and do belong to the chair are still there in its presence as dents or tears in its upholstery, because all the chair ever has is its presence in existence. There are, of course, many non-inert beings whose encounters with this piece of furniture may alter its constitution in some way, the world is a very volatile place full of moving things and acting beings. But whatever temporality is impressed into that chair, is not its own 'doing'. If this still appears a bit unsatisfactory, it may be due to our obsessive capacity to see the world as being the 'mirror' of our own consciousness, as described above. Perhaps the picture of how our being conscious of a world mistakenly gives us a reciprocally conscious world will emerge in the next paragraphs about time and lived-experience.

Any lived-experience is an experience of being within a world. But how exactly do these sensual interactions affect our sentient being. As sensitive creatures, we are constantly

affected by our perception of a sensible world. Not only do phenomena stimulate our senses, these stimulations produce subsequent phenomena which affect the very presence of our perceptual body.

If at one time, when a boy was two years old he walked into the river while his parents were not looking, very quickly the water came up to his waist and as he looked across the hypnotically shifting, speeding, glassy surface of the water, he became disoriented, a sudden panic and then the earth disappeared from beneath his feet and he was swallowed up by the turbulent current. Such an experience is fully affective. It is sensually overwhelming and emotionally confusing, intriguing and frightening. Such an experience structures the very foundations of a child's perceptual meaning. Even years later while in the back seat of a car being driven across a low bridge, the child develops an instant vertigo and must hide or cover his eyes in order to control the helpless desire of seemingly needing to be pulled into the water below.

A powerful lived experience does not recede into one's history, it continues to live as the echoes of sensual/emotional affect in the presence of the conscious-body. *"The past is not imported into [the] present by association ... but it is in the present consciousness already."*[69] A second, subsequently similar perceptual experience will naturally affect the senses and produce the same sort of sensual/emotional meaning-structure effect, now 'reflexively.' There is no need here to go searching for the past experience, which is always livingly present in every waking moment. Like the scratches on the chair, a person's perceptually lived past does not recede into a history of what was, but rather, those living affects continue to structure the very nature of one's consciousness and inform the essential meaning of a being's existence in the world.

We can imagine a child learning to cope with its being-in-the-world as this continuous

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[69] Ibid.; 19.

play between the senses, the structures of perception, the lived-experiences, informing one another and becoming shaped and reshaped in the process. Language changes the nature of the lived-experience as it is relived in every present moment. *"When I am installed in a language and this occurs the first time I am able to say something in it - I do not possess merely this or that word, but, rather, through the few expressions I can yet command, a whole way of 'living' the world, a special system of powers takes hold of me..."*[70] Language is our conscious acquaintance with time, and consciousness itself no longer remains an anonymously structured perceptual presence, but now experiences can be relived as those individual temporal events deliberately brought into focus through linguistic appeal.

Even after the acquisition of language, certain perceptual experiences will elicit certain spontaneous responses to any situation. Traumatic experiences will be strongly felt both sensually and emotionally and will tend to be more effective in forming the character of a child. But instead of doing child psychology, these paragraphs were meant to illustrate that meaning, even at the perceptual level, is a process of sensual and emotional affects aroused by particular sensible lived-situations. More important is the point that these experiences continue to live in the meaning-structure as the cognitive presence of that particular being. So the affective past, for a pre-linguistic child, is very much always present and every experience re-structures the cognitive/affective horizon of that particular consciousness. *"Though my present is ... this instant, it is equally this day, this year, my whole life."*[71]

Another way to examine this notion of how language preserves the meaning-time of an event, consider the following example from James Edie, in *Speaking and Meaning*, using the normal notion of temporality as a comparison,

"All the words in a novel exist in the same standard time (objectified) - but when read ... [in

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[70] Thomas Langan, *Critique of Reason*; p. 145.

[71] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 421.

order] to understand it, to reactivate its meaning for ourselves, we have to reintroduce the temporality of lived existence into it by beginning, at one point in time ... and ... through temporal sequences of moments, gradually arrive, after a period of time, at the conclusion. ...the living-through this period of time rules our access to the meaning *of the book..."*[72]

In this example we can see how language preserves the activity of meaning by taking up the time that it would normally take to actually live through some particular event. Edie goes on to claim that "*there is something intrinsically atemporal about the written word, and something intrinsically temporal about speaking and understanding.*"[73] To this statement I would add that reading is a way to bring the 'petrified time' out of the text, yet it is not quite like spontaneous speech-acts.

What is the significance of new or 'first time' experiences? Throughout the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty mentions the importance of first time experiences many times.[74] It is those living moments which generate meaning because these are the most affectively powerful sorts of lived-encounters. Moments which challenge our habitual orientation within space and motion - skiing, bungie-jumping, roller coaster riding or sky-diving - are such examples. In these experiences there is an electric memory of that 'feeling'. It is an overwhelming stimulation of the senses, so much so because it is a new experience, one has nothing to fall back on, to reflect on while the activity is happening. So one is thrown so completely into the activity that one lives during those moments fully immersed within the sensitivity of the living-body; the conscious-body.

For a young child who is learning to walk, every moment must be like some very powerful combination of those four exhilarating adult experiences. To be able to move across

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[72] Edie; p. 35.

[73] Ibid.; p. 36.

[74] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 30, 130, 281, 349, 328, 358, 390, 407.

the room on your own power, elevated to an unfamiliar height, tables are coming at you from weird angles, the floor is coming to meet your face unexpectedly, people are all excited, and the world seems to be whizzing by, practically a blur at times. This must be a phenomenally affective experience for the child. No wonder their faces are etched with pure joy and delight as they take those preliminary bi-pedular excursions across the room. I now tend to think of walking as a meaningless exercise, its just a part of my existence, I take it for granted. Yet talk to anyone who has lost the use of their legs and you will see that you are brought back to that pre-conceptual lived-experience of a child, where walking means everything.

The most euphoric/traumatic experience of adolescence or early adulthood is one's first sexual encounter. This is one of those very strange situations where the person can, under normal circumstances, choose to bring into meaning a very essential aspect of their lifetime being. The changes in one's physiological appearance during puberty have themselves been immensely affective, as one waits to see what one will look like after these phenomenal changes finally come to some end. That first sexual experience, however, is one left more in the control of the individual and it structures a whole lifetime of subsequent intimate encounters. People in their old age will quite easily and often longingly recall that initial intimate episode with another human being.

> *"My first perception, along with the horizons which surround it, is an ever-present event, an unforgettable tradition; even as a thinking subject, I still am that first perception, the continuation of that same life inaugurated by it. ...I am ... one single experience inseparable from itself, one single 'living cohesion', one single temporality which is engaged from birth in making itself progressively explicit, and confirming that cohesion in each successive present.'*[75]

If first time experiences do inform the very meaning structures of our being-in-the-world, then the lucid memory of the first kiss, the first love, the first orgasm, the first birthing are ample evidence that meaning is lived-experience. *"Acquisition must be accepted as an irreducible phenomenon. What we have experienced is, and remains, permanently ours; and in old age a*

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[75] Ibid.; p. 407.

man is still in contact with his youth."[76] The meaning which these first time experiences engender cannot be something which is merely 'out there' in the objects and their relations, but neither can it be given as an account of being 'in here' as subject exclusive. We must be willing to accept that what it means to 'give birth' will be different for the mother than for the non-mother, to say from the outset that the experience does not matter makes everything meaningless. Meaning cannot be described as the data of relations between the 'in here' and the 'out there', because such a relation is itself a linguistic convention. Meaning must be some sort of living overlap of activity and being, for it would make no sense at all for it to be some mere exclusive or disengaged relation between those two.

We have now established the basic ontology of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. From here we can investigate some of his unique concepts and how those ideas play into a formulation of meaning which corresponds with his 'ontology of ambiguity'.

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[76] Ibid.; p. 393.

CHAPTER THREE: THE GROUNDS OF PHENOMENAL MEANING

"The firmly composed elements [of language] form a certain kind of dead mass of language, but this mass carries the living germ of never-ending definability. Language contains a dark and unrevealed depth, as well, and a depth which reaches in two directions. For backwards as well as forwards, it flows out of (or into) an unknown wealth of materials, which may be recognized only up to a point and then vanish from view, leaving the feeling of unfathomable mystery. ...The two contradictory views here suggested - that language is both extrinsic to the psyche and a part of it, that it is both independent from it and dependent on it - pertain to it in reality and make out the individuality of its nature. ...Language is objective and independent to precisely the same degree that it is subjective and dependent. It has no abiding place anywhere... The true solution to the paradox lies in the unity of human nature."

- Wilhelm von Humboldt[77]

Merleau-Ponty incorporates many of the philosophical ideas brought forward by Husserl, especially those concerning the phenomenological account of meaning as being embedded within the experience of perception, into his unique ontology. He also adopts some of Ferdinand de Saussure's innovative ideas in the field of linguistics known as 'structuralism.' How these different perspectives blend with Merleau-Ponty's own innovations and their implications for a theory of meaning shall be examined here.

—Structuralist Meaning—

The basic innovations offered by structuralism are:

"*(1) what Saussure called his 'Principle 1' or 'the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign'; and (2) what might be called (though Saussure did not name or isolate it as such) 'the principle of the relational nature of all linguistic meaning'.*"[78]

From the structuralist perspective there are no such things as 'positive terms' which designate;

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[77] Humboldt, *Humanist Without Portfolio*; translated and edited by Marianne Cowan; p. 296-297.

[78] Colin Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*: towards a true postmodernism; p. 4.

"Linguistic signs, since they do not have their meanings by virtue of one-to-one correspondence with things in the world ... must therefore have meanings by virtue of their relationships with other signs within the linguistic systems of which they form a part."[79]

But structuralism also aims to destroy the notion that we, as subjects, create meaning through our activities, including our conscious-acts. As Vincent Descombes says,

"...the origin of meaning can no longer be located where the phenomenologists had thought to find it, in the author of the discourse, the individual who believes he is expressing himself, but rather it lies in the language itself. ...not man, but structures are decisive."[80]

Merleau-Ponty does not adopt a complete structuralist account, but tries to incorporate some of Saussure's insights concerning linguistic meaning into his own phenomenology. *"The Phenomenology of Perception could offer no insight into the problem of the passage from perceptual meaning to linguistic meaning, from behaviourism to thematization."*[81] He hoped to discover in the structure of perception something analogous to and perhaps generative for the structure of language. Merleau-Ponty had, already before his interest in Saussure, subscribed to the arbitrariness of words - that there was nothing in the sign itself which directly reflected or expressed its semantic content.

Yet he also describes a meaningful content of any word which extends beyond the merely linguistic account. We are emotionally attached to our words in some very crucial sense. *"The phonetic gesture brings about 'a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence' between speaker and listener."*[82] In this phenomenological sense *"the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified is thus only apparent, once the linguistic sign has been*

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[79] Ibid.; p. 5.

[80] Vincent Descombes, quoted from *Maurice Merleau-Ponty - Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* by James Schmidt; p. 164.

[81] James Schmidt; p. 151.

[82] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 193.

restored to its original, emotive function'[83] that is while the word is being used and understood in a dialogue. In those instances, *"it will become apparent that the signified does indeed bear a certain resemblance to what it signifies."*[84] When language, or its parts, is looked at in isolation from human activity, in a purely linguistic self-analysis, the structuralist insights appear to be most plausible, but in an analysis of language-usage, the meaning's scope extends into lived experience through sensual perception, emotion, intention and other human acts of conscious-being.

The difference between a phenomenological approach to meaning and a structural one, is in the distinction between "parole" (speech-acts) and "langue" (the abstract language). While Merleau-Ponty gives priority to "parole" as being an essential component of those varied and uniquely human activities of our conscious-bodies, Saussure prioritizes "langue" as ultimately defining the structure of "parole" in the service of establishing his 'science of linguistics.' Taking the written word over the spoken word makes a great difference. A philosophy of presence gives precedence to life, while a philosophy with 'theory as its end' is best applied when dealing with dead linguistic items. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigation into semantic meaning was supposed to eventually provide *"a precise description of the passage of the perceptual faith into explicit truth as we encounter it on the level of language, concept and the cultural world."*[85] According to James Schmidt this 'study of expression' in *Prose of the World*, *"would show how the world of perception is transposed into a world of signs which have meaning for*

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[83] Schmidt, *Between Phenomenology and Structuralism*; p. 116.

[84] Ibid.; p. 116.

[85] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non Sense*; p. 94.

others."[86]

Here the problem of the exact relationship between the lived body and the language became more pronounced because in order to accept some of the structuralist thesis, it became essential to give over to the language itself some of what Merleau-Ponty had in his previous works ascribed to the lived experiences of the conscious body. Where does language, with its mysterious efficacy, fit into the activity of the body subject? If, on Saussure's account, linguistic meaning is a matter of the differences between the 'chosen' words and the rest of the lexical whole of meaning, and if this linguistic meaning is the only meaning that really matters then what exactly describes the relationship between the expressive agent and that vast linguistic realm, a realm whose meaning appears to be agent-exclusive, except in those moments of actual speaking. Merleau-Ponty stressed "*...that the theorist's structures must at some point or another ... have a lived equivalent.*"[87] This must be true and is made evident in the fact that new linguistic meaning is always being created.

---The Turn to Linguistic Divergence---

Merleau-Ponty's turn to some of the insights of structuralism was in part due to his need to replace the subjectivist aspect of a philosophy of consciousness. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, the tacit *cogito* retained some of the trappings of a constituting consciousness[88],

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[86] James Schmidt, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism*; p. 103.

[87] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 119.

[88] In his later philosophy, Merleau-Ponty had completely altered this notion of a tacit cogito, "*...if subject were taken not as a constituting but an instituting subject, it might be understood that the subject does not exist instantaneously and that the other person does not exist simply as the negation of myself... and instituting subject could coexist with another because the one instituted is not the immediate reflection of the activity of the former and can be regained by himself or by others without involving anything like a total recreation. Thus the instituted subject exists between others and myself, between me and myself, like a hinge...*"

even in its ontological reduction to an anonymous perceiving subject. Husserl's transcendental ego had not yet been completely erased from the explanatory field of meaning. Merleau-Ponty embraced those aspects of structuralism which allowed him to finally eradicate the notion of a non-phenomenal subject from his phenomenology. This move threatened to create new problems for his ontology because a reified language or abstract text now imposed its non-phenomenal existence into the description of meaning. Here Husserl's notion of a lifeworld could come to the phenomenological rescue. After all, language itself lives within the cultural aspects of the phenomenal world, thus no Cartesian *cogito* as such was required to found the relationship between the lived body of perception and the lived world of language. If this 'thing' called a language is to have some form of 'existence' then a lifeworld seems the appropriate place to locate it. The perception of the body-subject as conscious-being discloses language as moving freely within the cultural conceptions of the lifeworld-activity and also within the environmental limitations of the phenomenal world.

So in the final analysis, Merleau-Ponty accepts the structural schema which claims that the linguistic meaning of an expressed sign is contained in the 'difference' between that utterance and the language as a whole; however, 'language as a whole' is a richer concept here than in Saussure's structuralism. Since Merleau-Ponty gives priority to the acts of utterance over the fact of the written text, which is itself actualized in a meaningful context only when being read, he also maintains that complete meaning, in the sense of the Husserlian intentionality thesis, is not to be found within the language itself, but rather, in the fulfilled experience of the expression of a lived experience. He is then left to discover how the meaning of perception is related to the meaning of language.

"Whereas he had originally begun with the very Husserlian thesis that linguistic meaning is 'founded' in the perceptual articulation of objects, he was, in his final [or later] work, attempting to understand

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quoted from 'Themes from Lectures' 1952-1960 translated by John O'Neill (p. 40), in *Between Phenomenology and Structuralism*; p. 80.

the perceptual articulation of the world on the analogy of linguistic structure."[89]

He develops his theory of 'reversibility' in an attempt to show how the visible meaning of perception is related to the invisible meaning of language. Humboldt may provide an early account of the relation that Merleau-Ponty seeks to articulate in his notion of 'reversibility':

> *"Sensuousness and non-sensuousness are related by a mysterious link, and if our eyes are denied sight of it, our feelings are not denied intuition of it. To the twofold nature of the visible and the invisible world, to the congenital longing for the latter and the feeling of sweet indispensability of the former, we owe all of our philosophic systems which have grown truly out of man's intrinsic nature, as well as our most senseless sentimentalities."*[90]

---The Visible Reversibility---

Martin Dillon in *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* takes on the task of clearly articulating the unique notions which Merleau-Ponty sets out in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The primary case of a 'reversibility' relation takes place in the visible realm of the perception of phenomena. The nature of perception is such that as the being (pre-conceptual?) begins to live the world through its senses, the very structure of its sensual experience, its attention to certain particular figures, is dependent upon the background of what it has previously experienced. And what it has previously experienced is largely dependent upon the particular sensorial nature with which the world itself has endowed this creature. So we see that any world which some creature might possibly experience through perception is in large part configured by the particular way that this same world has arranged the sensorium of the creature. Perception of a world is like the world turning back upon itself in a 'effort' to understand its own creative power. It is like *"...that of the crossing and turning back on itself of the single thread that emanates from the spider's body when she spins her web. This web matrix, the whole cloth, the*

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[89] Edie; p. 107.

[90] *Wilhelm von Humboldt, Humanist Without Portfolio*; p. 333.

flesh, of the world is an intertwining, an elementary knotting, which is always prior to its unravelling in language and thought."[91]

Like the cognitive ambiguity of someone's clasped hands touching and being touched, perception of a world is thus, in ideal epistemic terms, ambiguous. While the perceiver is a product of a world, her perceived world is also a product of her own lived perceiving. This notion of reversibility serves to explain the creative nature of life itself, which I would describe as a continuous 'going through the being itself' in order to sustain its life in the world. So life over time, that living and perceiving aspect of being a life, moves as if it is not only in a world but also in itself as a perceived world, and this sort of reversibility allows 'life in general' the capability to change in the changing face of the world. This describes "*...the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed, and the sensed to the sentient."*[92]

This reversibility is however, not exactly like the balanced ambiguity of the left hand and the right hand touching and being touched. Perceptual reversibility is asymmetrical and there is, therefore, no predictable path by which the movement of perception might be traced. Each conscious-body has a unique relationship with its perceived world; there is no universal form of perceptual meaning. As subject of one's body and as object of one's perception, one and one's body can never coincide perfectly, "*they are nonetheless reversible and that reversibility places them within the same ontological category."*[93]

---The Invisible Reversibility---

In his book *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty stakes out clearly how some of the part-to-whole

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[91] Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; p. 155.

[92] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*; p. 142.

[93] Dillon; *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; p. 169.

aspects of linguistic meaning play out in his theory. Borrowed partly from Saussure, he states that "*taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and ... each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark out a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs.*"[94] Yet the "*act of speech is the movement that overcomes*" this relation. "*Communication goes from the whole of the speaker's language to the whole of the hearer's language ... the unity ...is a unity of coexistence.*"[95] So through expression and understanding, the language is brought to life. Merleau-Ponty continually stresses the living aspect of a language, "*speech is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language ... to understand it ... we only have to lend ourselves to its life, to its movement of differentiation and articulation...*"[96] He keeps some of the structural insights and intermingles them with his adherence to the presence of life. He adds, "*...meaning is the total movement of speech, our thoughts crawl along in language.*"[97]

Like most contemporary linguists,[98] Merleau-Ponty held that we learn our first language as a whole, as a dynamic aspect of our living activity. "*The whole of the spoken language surrounding the child snaps him up like a whirlwind, tempts him by its internal articulations, and brings him almost up to the moment when all this noise begins to mean something.*"[99] We tend to forget what a pre-written form of language was like. Humboldt gives us an account of how

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[94] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 39.

[95] Ibid.; p. 39.

[96] Ibid.; p. 42.

[97] Ibid.; p. 42.

[98] See Christina Erneling's *Understanding Language Acquisition* (1994) or G. Miller and P. Gildea on *How Children Learn Words* (1987), or Breyne Moskowitz' *The Acquisition of Language* (1978).

[99] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 40.

intrinsically transitory and idiosyncratic are the languages of the pre-textual cultures.[100] It is only when the rules are laid down in writing and the grammar is given a systematized structure that the living aspect is wrung out of the fabric of language. And finally then, rules of grammar and linguistic structure are rarely broken . . . *not*! Language, like all other of the human behaviours cannot be contained by artificial systems, such is the living nature of evolving entities. When a child begins to discover meaning, *"he comes to enter that domain whose doors, it is believed, open from within."*[101]

The child at first uses a single word in the way that an adult uses a sentence. Even the act of pointing in a young child is an actively meaningful gesture. It originally does not serve to denote some 'thing' to the other person, but rather, it is used as an abrupt metaphor. Pointing, like singular words, means "I want that!" or "That thing is scaring me!" but a child does not originally, unless it is taught to do so, point anything out to someone strictly for the end of denoting and nothing more. *"Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc., - they learn to fetch books, to sit in armchairs, etc.."*[102] When a child learns its first words, they are used singularly as gestures.[103] The utterance "Car!" does not merely denote a vehicle, it means "I want to go for a ride!" or when said in a different tone, "We just went for a ride." Of course the child learns very quickly to name things and point them out, and also to use strings of words to explicitly express actions, so these original stages of learning pass rapidly.

Some might like to claim a nominalist origin for language; that it is pointing and

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[100] Humboldt, *On Language*.

[101] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 40.

[102] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*; (p. 476), as quoted by Erneling in *Understanding Language Acquisition*; p. 140.

[103] Breyne Moskowitz, *The Acquisition of Language*; from *The Emergence of Language: development and evolution*, ed. W. Wang; pp. 138-139.

naming, rather than the expression of activities, which lead eventually to linguistic competence and understanding. Yet Merleau-Ponty shows that no animals or prelinguistic children understand the nature of pointing which is, as gestures go, a complicated form of communication, "*...this pointing gesture, which animals do not understand, supposes that we are already installed in a virtual space...*"[104] Pointing requires familiarity with the lived experience of space, but even more, it seems to require a certain kind of self-consciousness in order to be properly understood. An explicit sense of reflection is required before pointing can be used as a gestural tool. The child must understand the spatial relations of the body as an individual self in contrast with the world as other, and must also conceptually understand that the other person is playing this particular form of a gestural game. Understanding, as a form of reflection, is essential to the act of pointing.

We can examine more closely the reversible aspects of linguistic acts only by stressing the temporal and living nature of meaningful language as it appears in conversations. However, in the larger context of the relation of the world to language "*...the meaning structure of language reflects the meaning structure of the world because what is made intelligible in language is the world's innate intelligibility. Language is the* Logos *of the world.*"[105]

Language, according to Merleau-Ponty, contains two moments, one of expression and the other of 'sedimentation'; these two are in an asymmetrical relation. Expression always returns to the culturally sedimented linguistic meaning and by so doing, minimally realigns it, while expression itself is born from the conscious-body's understanding of previous moments of already pre-sedimented meanings. All speaking activity takes place in a public world of a speaker and an other being spoken to, and vice versa. In dialogue, one is like the hand

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[104] Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*; translated by James Edie; p. 7.

[105] Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; p. 172.

touching and being touched; always switching roles in the play of a language game.

When a child learns to use the word "I" properly, he has also learned to become linguistically reversible.[106] When the child in speaking says "I," it refers to the self, but when that same child hears the other say "I" then it refers to the other. When this role-reversal is understood, the very nature of the reversibility of language is also understood; the "I" and the "you" are signs which must be turned 'inside-out' with every turn of the focus of the conversation from speaker to listener. The interchangeability of the meanings of these two pronouns is another example of the ambiguity of the unattached sign.

This example above is a very particular instance of how the reversibility of language works. In the larger sense, any expression uttered by a linguistically reasonable user is informed by the linguistic community at large. As speakers we learn the meanings of our language in the context of our particular culture and its historical presence in reference to our own experiences. In making an utterance we express ourselves from our own understanding of that general context, but in the act of expression we create the possibility of new meaning in the context of the others' meanings. Each lived world is unique to the person who inhabits and structures it through their own lived body experiences. In virtue of this uniqueness, most every expression will be, to some extent, also unique as it finds its place in the whole or part of the hearing/speaking community. Subsequent expressions by those who have heard will reflect the already sedimented meaning of that original unique utterance. So the reversibility of the relation between expression and sedimentation also follows the movement of meaning as it constantly changes in the changing face of the world and culture.

---Reversibility in the Larger Sense---

This theory holds that as phenomenal beings our immediate relationship to the world

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[106] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 348.

(and to others) through our perception, and our mediate relationship to one another (and to the world) through language, are two distinct cyclical processes which are ultimately related to each other by a larger reversibility[107]. The most used example of this reversibility is 'the hand touching and being touched[108]': when the left and right hand are in tactile contact, one's awareness of the situation is alternately of the left hand being touched or the left hand doing the touching. There is no 'truth' to the situation, except that it is ambiguous as *"a prereflective and preobjective unity of my lived body."*[109] Truth does not come as something singular, *"ambiguity is the essence of human existence, [in that] everything we live or think has always several meanings."*[110]

We have so far described two sets of reversible movement and now we must try to find the essential connection between these two. *"...[T]he reversibility of the visible and the invisible ... is to be conceived as reflection, reflection in the dual sense of meaning and of thought."*[111] What then, is the cognitive hinge or the nexus where this reversibility between perception and language takes place? It must, according to the above quotation, be where both meaning and thought ultimately meet. *"Language is the medium in which the world is reflected ... it does not duplicate or copy the world; it is, rather, the manner in which the world's intelligibility / meaning /*

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[107] M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; pp. 153-176.

[108] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 93.

[109] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*; translated by A. Lingis; p. 141.

[110] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 169.

[111] Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; p. 171.

sense unfolds."[112] So, at the extreme ends of this play, we have the world set against its reflection in language, what we need to find is the 'living mirror', the thing through which the one becomes the other and vice versa.

In the following 'simplified' representations we can try to picture the whole process of a dual reversibility. In figures (A) and (B) are crudely represented: (A) the emergence of a living body from the world, and (B) the fundamental linear or behavioural interrelationships between these initial complications of *'one essential being'* in the form of awareness (sense) and activity (body) aimed back upon itself.

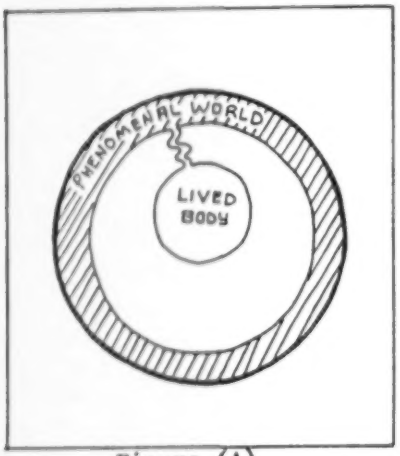

Figure (A)

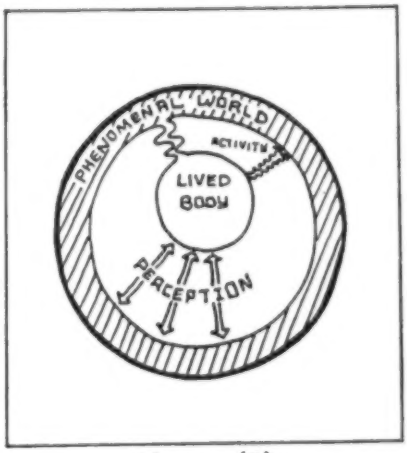

Figure (B)

In figure (C) we can see the 'brute' reversibility of perception as the action of the world on a perceiving body and the reciprocal action of that body on the world. The acts of that lived body are structured by the previous lived experiences of that 'being-in-the-world' which are in return structured by the changing nature of the world perceived and experienced by the lived body. The major difference between (B) and (C) is that there exists some sort of raw form of reflection or reciprocality as the perception and activity of the conscious body work in a sort of non-linear dance with the world.

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[112] Ibid.; p. 171.

The dark wavy arrow marked 'implicit inter-subjectivity' is how this minimal sort of reflexivity is here represented. This living being can use gestures to communicate with what appears to it to be its living world. It can make no reflective distinction between the 'phenomenal world' and the 'other lived-world' even though it can already communicate with the 'lived-world' at some 'brute' level.

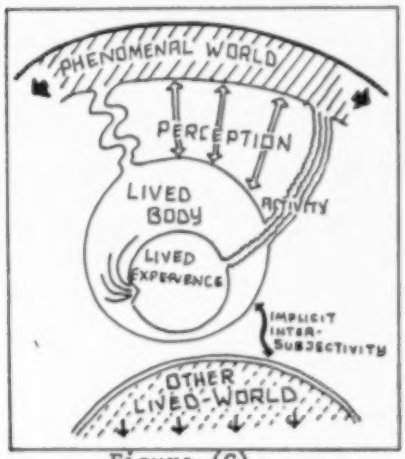

Figure (C)

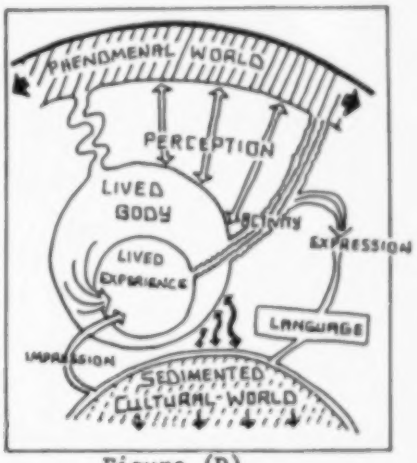

Figure (D)

In figure (D) we can see represented the complexity of the dual reversibilities acting ultimately through and intertwining with one another. Expression is a special sort of activity aimed not directly at the world, but at other embodied subjects in the world, who are in a deep sense beings in the world each with their own 'worlds' (of lived experience) in the being, and each with a dual capacity to reach out to the other beings in the world by communicating their own 'worlds' through a language. The 'sedimented cultural-world' is not only the language, but also the whole sense of community, which includes art, science, and all the technologies of human creation. So the reversibility is not only evident in the actions of the human beings, it is also evident in the dramatic changes wrought upon the planet as a result of these activities. *"The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject*

itself projects."[113] Whatever we, as a culture, do to our environment, it will come back to reciprocally effect us in some equivalent or non-equivalent way.

In our contemporary world, we are born into technology. Some children have never had the experience of living in a 'brute' being with nature; they do not even see a distinction between the cultural world and the phenomenal world because for them the two have merged into one. The intertwining (chiasm) of worlds has become so pervasive that the divergence (ecart) is indistinguishable.

Those who claim that 'the text is everything' are like those half blind children. Those who claim that there is no such thing as prelinguistic experience have become blinded by the language of culture.[114] Those who insist that only scientific language has any real meaning have left their bodies behind in their blind pursuit for the perfect and elusive 'mind': an *objective* one (?), that is.

Where do we find that 'living mirror' mentioned earlier? Where is the 'prism' which breaks the light of the world into the music of language? Where is the cypher with the secret key to our reflective code?

---Silence---

Merleau-Ponty revealed no secret here. He died before he had completed his work and appropriately he left us with 'silence'. Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger and a host of others before him, he called this secret place where the two rivers of reversibility meet 'silence'. "*It is our wonder in the face of the world,*" a description similar to the one which Merleau-Ponty credits to Eugen Fink, Husserl's assistant, in his formulation of 'the reduction.'[115]

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[113] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 430.

[114] We can recall Derrida's claim that experience 'outside of the text' is quite impossible.

[115] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. xiii.

This 'silence' can best be described as Merleau-Ponty does early in his career in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. *"The [pre-reflective] consciousness which conditions the language is merely a comprehensive and inarticulate grasp upon the world, like that of an infant at its first breath..."*[116] In his last and unfinished work, which was posthumously published as *The Visible and the Invisible*, he speaks of its further relation to language, *"...language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the other has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave."*[117]

In chapter five, we shall examine some other perspectives on 'silence' but for now we do have a clue as to how we might possibly articulate this phenomenon, *"We need then, to seek the first attempts at language in the emotional gesticulation whereby man superimposes on the given world, the world according to man..."*[118] In order to speak to this 'silence,' we can turn back two hundred and twenty-five years, to the insights of a brilliant German romantic writer, Johann Herder.

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[116] Ibid.; p. 404.

[117] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*; p. 126.

[118] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 188.

CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS AND ORIGINS

"These things can't be given names but in a way these are all attempts at creating a new kind of school or a new kind of monastery ... islands of safety where history can be remembered and where the human being can continue to function in order to maintain the species through a dark age. In other words, we're talking about an underground ... and the purpose of this underground is to find out how to preserve the light . . . life . . . the culture; how to keep things living!

You see I keep thinking that what we need is a new kind of language; a language of the heart. ...some kind of language between people which is a new kind of poetry, like the poetry of the dancing bee that tells us where the honey is. And I think that in order to create that language, you're going to have to learn how you can go 'through a looking glass', into another kind of perception. Where you have the sense of being united to all things . . . and suddenly, you understand everything."

- Andre Gregory[119]

In this chapter we shall examine several notions which originate with Johann Herder in reference to our linguistic activity. These innovative ideas, which were largely ignored until Wittgenstein and Heidegger introduced similar versions in the twentieth century, are discussed frequently by Charles Taylor. They concern the descriptions of the nature of language and the nature of the conceptual attributes required for its acquisition and also its generation. These notions center around: *i)* the way that language is embedded within our living activities and how it is essentially expressive and only secondarily instrumental; *ii)* the fact that the development of reason and language are mutually interdependent and are both bound up with meaning and reflection; *iii)* and a notion of 'rightness' or correctness as inseparable from language use and also from a 'reflective' engagement which is best exemplified in the acts of 'play' and especially in imitation.

—The Sensorial Whole—

In a slight divergence before we begin, let us examine the 'sensorium commune' of the

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[119] From the movie *'My Dinner with Andre'*, written by Andre Gregory and Wallace Shawn, directed by Louis Malle, 1981.

body as a sensing subject, a concept which Merleau-Ponty borrows from Herder.[120] What does our active contact with the phenomenal world through our lived bodies produce phenomenally within us? *"Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence."*[121] We need not here debate about the different ways in which 'the world' might be brought into our internal being by each of the different senses, but speak broadly in terms of sensual lived-affect.[122] Let the following continuity be representative of non-linguistic lived-experiences:

A) The *aesthetic* visual lived-affect produced when seeing a sharp object lying in the center of some neutral surface.

B) The *tactile* lived-affect aroused by the act of rolling a slender, sharp object between a thumb and two fingers.

C) The *painful* lived-affect produced when a sharp object enters the flesh of the sole of your foot.

D) The *emotive* lived-affect of sympathy aroused upon seeing that a sharp object has pierced the body of another person and hearing that person's cry of pain.

It is, of course, impossible to 'know' any of these experiences without explicitly reflecting on them, even though they can all be experienced directly. From our present vantage point of interested disengagement we can certainly sense the required appreciation for each of the

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[120] Johann Herder, *On the Origin of Language*; translated by F. Barnard in *Herder: On Social and Political Culture*; p. 144. And quoted by Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 235.

[121] Merleau-Ponty, *The Eye and the Mind*; from The Primacy of Perception, edited by James Edie; p. 164.

[122] Let me draw out the meaning of 'lived-affect' as used here. Without making a distinction between the physical noun 'affect': *the way in which a thing is physically affected or disposed; especially the actual state or disposition of the body* (OED), and the psychological noun 'affect': *the felt or affective component of a stimulus or motive to action*, the 'lived-affect' is meant to contain both of these meanings at once *and never* as one and not the other.

above lived-affects, (aesthetic, tactile, painful, emotive, visual, audible), as they might be felt directly.

Our sensorial bodies are the 'brute' ways that we open ourselves up to a world. Through phenomenal inter-minglings with our senses, the world comes into us in various ways. *"Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them."*[123] Each particular sense has its own way of having a world, but no sense can work in complete isolation. As Herder says, the body is always a 'sensorium commune'; how ever many senses we may have they are always acting in some kind of synthesis. We can change our attentive focus from one sense to the other, but all of them are constantly informing the body in contact with a world.

We might think of a sliver entering our finger as somehow quite different from the light entering our eye or an odour entering our nose, yet all of these are sensual apprehensions and the nerves which 'vibrate' at the tips of our fingers are analogous to the optic nerves which lead from the eyes. Pain as well as pleasure must somehow enter into and affect our living body. Our conscious bodies then react to these sensual stimulations in affective arousals which can become expressive acts of gestural or verbal form. This account may appear to be somewhat behaviouristic; however, with the acquisition of language and given the complexity of the body as the 'sensorium commune', a stimulus-response characterization of our activity becomes contradictory in the face of intentionality and in the spectral vastness of the sensual variations entering our 'open' body.

A point can be made here concerning behaviourism which shows that animals are tested in controlled experimentation with regard to their responses to singular stimuli only. We do not test the rat's holistic behaviour; its responses to the whole of its environment, including being confined within a tiny cage throughout its life and being handled by huge

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[123] Ibid.; p. 164.

creatures in white suits. Behaviourism may itself, in fact, be pathological.

—Linguistic Origins—

In his essay *On the Origin of Language* (1770), Herder criticises several existing theories concerning the probable genesis of language. He wants to dispel the idea that language was a gift from the Divine Creator, and in this regard to speak to the relation between reason and language. He also criticizes a nominalist view of language acquisition as well as the popular theories of that day which claimed that language arose *directly* and essentially intact out of emotional expression (Condillac and Rousseau).

Herder believes that such theories of language development leave something most essential entirely out of the picture or that they presuppose it. This something is the notion of 'reflection', which is related to reason: it seems that one cannot obtain a language without already having the capacity to reflect, yet one could not attain a reflective capacity without the aid of some basic linguistic structure through which it might operate.

On the second point, he is not rejecting outright the notion that language might have developed due to the verbalization of certain unreflective expressions of primary lived-affects or behaviours. He is however, requiring that there must be some other functional ability, like a cognitive capacity to reflect, which dramatically changes the cognitive framework. "*Just because he cannot see language/reason as a mere addition to our animal nature, he is led to ask what kind of transformation of our psychic life attends the rise of language.*"[124] This alteration in awareness is required to allow language into the conscious activity of the 'blindly' expressive being.

Put into more contemporary terminology, a thoroughgoing form of stimulus-response behaviour cannot, merely through complications, turn into a linguistic capability. In a current

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[124] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*; p. 92.

example, there is something missing in the cognitive-world of the 'signing' chimpanzee, which the newly linguistic child already has. In the clinical environment of the learning chimp *"signalling 'want banana' has been made right because it gets the banana ... or perhaps attention."*[125] But according to Taylor the success at a task is not the sort of 'rightness' which Herder has in mind, *"a different kind of 'getting it right' in language"*[126] is required. This extra capacity is the ability to understand what the speaker is saying and expect proper answers. Taylor puts this thesis in terms of a certain 'rightness' of language use, which only human beings possess.

"A creature is operating in the linguistic dimension when it can use and respond to signs in terms of their truth, or descriptive rightness, or the power to evoke some mood, or recreate a scene, or express some emotion, or carry some nuance of feeling... To be a linguistic creature is to be sensitive to irreducible issues of rightness. Whether a creature is in the linguistic dimension ... isn't a matter of what correlations hold between the signals it emits, its behaviour, and its surroundings - the kinds of things the proponents of chimp language focus on"[127]

This notion of 'rightness' as developed by Taylor is surely essential to a proper account of how linguistic reflection occurs. We use words according to their correctness, as we understand them, and many times we choose to use certain words when talking to one person, while we would use different words when saying much the same thing to a different person. So this sense of rightness applies not only to the words and their meaning, but also in a larger sense to the personality of the other to whom we speak. But this is not Herder's concern. He is interested in a description of reflection as it might occur in those creatures which are themselves developing a language. On this 'point of origin' even Merleau-Ponty would claim that any such theory could only be purely speculative.

Let us examine briefly the notion of reflection, first in Herder's naive characterization

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[125] Ibid.; p. 84.

[126] Ibid.; p. 84.

[127] Ibid.; p. 84.

and then in terms of another of his insightful claims, one which involves the notion of a 'third stance' as being essential to the possibility of reflection. Herder sees the human condition at birth as one of *'utter wretchedness'*.[128] A neonate is a helpless being devoid of most instincts, except those that are vital for its moment to moment survival, (e.g. breathing). This "*most abandoned child of nature*"[129] is provided with an adequate set of senses, none of which is powerful enough to drive the helpless, weak, and needy baby to some particular activity. Herder concludes that these circumstances open the child up to a unique situation in the world. In direct contrast to all other animals, Herder claims, the human child is forced to learn through its own direct experience all those specific behaviours which come instinctively to the others. This complete dependence upon active learning gives the human infant a voracious appetite to learn, an appetite which allows it to eclipse, within a few years, the range of skilled activities of all other creatures. Learning helps human children to leap into a realm of comprehension which those others, who rely more heavily on both innate and learned instinct, can never manage to accomplish.

How does it happen that humans become linguistic beings? According to Herder, it is directly due to the overall weakness of our individual senses as well as their ability to work together in some type of balance. He brings in the 'play' of the three major senses and their relative weakness to advantage here in his rather speculative account. Herder makes the case for the sense of *touch* and the sense of *sight* as being complimentary in the framework of the 'sensorium commune'. The first is very intimate and gives us direct perceptual knowledge of the concreteness of a specific 'thing' while the latter is more detached and gives us a distanced perception of all the general 'things' in the vicinity. He then further claims that our sense of

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[128] Johann Herder, *On the Origin of Language*; from *Herder On Social and Political Culture*; p. 130.

[129] Ibid.; p. 130.

hearing is the important *'middle sense' which can mediate between the precise closeness of* touch and the general distance of sight. Hearing is also the sense most easily imitated. A human might have some difficulty communicating some sense of an object through either touch or sight, except when in the presence of that particular thing by way of pointing.[130] It would be difficult to visually or tangibly exchange through these silent means (touch and sight) the indication of 'sheep', but it is quite easy to imitate the sound of a sheep.[131] Children learn the sounds of animals before they learn to speak, or perhaps, if Herder is correct, this is one of the ways in which they actually learn to speak. So for Herder, hearing plays that 'third' role as the sense through which the objects of sight and the sensual lived-affects of touch can be meaningfully related. If one pauses to listen to the sheep, it will speak. In some calm moment of vacant arousal, one can then imitate that same sound and in a sense indicate or mean or 'sign' or sing the object of one's tangible lived-affect and visual captivation.

If we take these perhaps naive notions together, we can see not only the emergence of reflection, but also the simultaneous emergence of a language. Hearing is a temporal sense. It can awaken one from some obsessed activity or suddenly redirect one's attention into some different mode (e.g. a cry of pain can arouse some feeling of empathy). Sometimes one must pause in the directedness of activity in order to hear what is already visible or tangible. Hearing is temporally affective on one's awareness in that sometimes one must wait for some visually or tangibly perceived thing to make some audible noise as its identifying mark. In

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[130] Pointing, as discussed earlier, is a very complex learned skill and not an innate behaviour.

[131] It is interesting that Chinese writing depends on the visual and tangible aspects of the things or acts or events in order to express in script the semantics of their language. The Western languages, on the other hand, write out the phonetically minimal sounds as their scriptive method. It is not then surprising that meanings in those Oriental languages are steeped in metaphor, while the Western semantic system is often thought to be denotational and somehow internally fragmented.

this way the world speaks meaningfully to a child in those special moments, which the child might then verbally imitate to another human being. These performances, like primitive dances or mimes, are forms of communication and they teach the child how to play the language game, the rules of which are implicit within the acts themselves.

This story about the sense of hearing filling the role of a third position, which can serve to mediate between the other two senses (sight as the external and touch as the internal), is not explicitly used by Herder as an example of the 'third stance' although it might be taken as such. His reference to a 'third' is a logical constraint on the notion of acquiring a language. *"It is the third which constitutes the significant characteristic and which fashions the identifying symbol we apply to it within our mind."*[132] It is interesting to note that for Herder, reflection in the human being is the emergence also of mind, *"we shall call this whole disposition of his nature mind (Besonnenheit)."*[133]

If one is caught up, perceptually, in a world of a purely linear relation, that of the relation between an affected, sentient subject and a visible object, there is no space here for reflection to emerge, nor for language. It seems that the acquisition of a sign as something which takes up that *relationship* as 'the other thing referring to it' necessitates that the very same subject, which is fully caught up within that relationship (as subject to object), somehow disengage from the immediacy of the direct relation and yet maintain the semblance of that very structure so as to understand the 'meaning' of the sign. This is of course just another version of the necessity of reflection. So while apes do not seem capable of stepping out of their primary activity and thus they see their signing as completely part of that activity, humans have the capacity to step outside (or apart and into a new dimension) and to

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[132] Ibid.; p. 137.

[133] Ibid.; p. 132.

understand why certain signs carry certain appropriate meanings. These meanings refer to the activity which 'goes on' adjacent to or parallel to the signifying act itself. So this ability to reflect by temporarily moving out-of-the-activity is really that important third space we require in order to understand the relation between the original two. *"For the difference [or similarity] between two things can be determined only by means of a third."*[134] Learning a language is the ability to essentially do two things at once, while smelling the banana I can also describe how much I like it or say that I would like to eat it. This sort of dual-activity can only be accomplished by moving into some other dimension. Taylor calls it the 'linguistic dimension.'

I should make it clear here that neither Herder nor Taylor mean by 'moving outside' that a new (Kantian) faculty emerges. In keeping with Calvin Schrag's explication of Merleau-Ponty's notion of reflecting, we might say that it is a certain sensorial configuration of the conscious-body which makes possible this new and innovative from of awareness. *"Reflection will involve not a move to another standpoint but ways of moving about in our everyday engagements. ...Distanciation makes possible the understanding and evaluation of our participation, not from a vantage point beyond it, but from the changing perspectives within it."*[135]

It may be useful for our purposes to point out here how meaning (noema) on Husserl's model of intentionality functions as a 'third stance'. Merleau-Ponty describes in his own words Husserl's version of the emergence of reflection from *Ideas II*.

> *"...what link is there between my body and me in addition to the regularities of occasional causality? There is a relation of my body to itself which makes it the vinculum of the self and things. When my right hand touches my left, I am aware of it as a 'physical thing.' But at the same moment, if I wish, an extraordinary event takes place: Here is my left hand as well starting to perceive my right... The physical thing becomes animate. Or more precisely, it remains what it was (the event does not enrich it), but an exploratory power comes to rest upon or dwell in it. Thus I touch myself touching; my body accomplishes 'a sort of reflection.'"*[136]

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[134] Ibid.; p. 137.

[135] Calvin Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity*; p. 53.

[136] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 166.

Merleau-Ponty continues, *"If the distinction between subject and object is blurred in my body ... it is also blurred in the thing, which is the pole of my body's operations, the terminus its exploration ends up in, and which is thus woven into the same intentional fabric as my body."*[137] If one could not cognitively move into the realm of 'meaning' how could one ever understand the relation between the acts of consciousness and the objects of consciousness? If one remained totally immersed within the world as an active subject cognitively apprehending worldly objects directly, one would be perceptually caught within the behaviouristic realm. In order to open up a place for language one has to somehow remove oneself from the rush of behaviour. *"Man, endowed with a mind ... has by his very first act of spontaneous reflection invented language."*[138] One has to be reflective and therefore implicitly self-conscious.

"Man alone possesses this reflective power; it is the complex resultant of all of his faculties, rather than merely one faculty among others, and it is in this capacity for reflection that human freedom also has its source"[139](Herder).

This 'third stance' is also well developed by Schiller in his description of Beauty as the synthesis of the 'sense impulse' and the 'form impulse' into what he calls *'living shape'* (or the object of the 'play impulse').[140] We see that it is perhaps Schiller who takes Fichte's Kantianism and combines it with Herderian views and in so doing opens the space through which Hegel's views emerge. *"Beauty combines the two opposite conditions of perceiving and thinking, and yet there is no possible mean between the two of them ... then Beauty combines those two opposite conditions, and thus removes the opposition. But since both conditions remain eternally*

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[137] Ibid.; p. 167.

[138] Herder, *On the Origin of Language*; p. 134.

[139] Falck; (translated from Herder's *Samtliche Werke*, vol. 5, pp. 28-29) Appendix to second edition.

[140] Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*; p. 76.

opposed to one another, they can only be combined by cancellation."[141] We witness here the emergence of that famous Hegelian technical term for a dialectical synthesis (Aufgehoben). Schiller continues, *"Our second business, then, is to make this combination perfect, to accomplish it so purely and completely that both conditions entirely disappear in a third, and no trace of the division remains behind in the whole;..."*[142] It all reminds one, rather curiously, of Husserl's famous *epoche'*.

All forms of materialist or causal-model language philosophies simply presuppose language as already effectively part of their theories. Yet without language, as in the case of a prelinguistic child, there is no reflective access to the memory, which those same theorists offer as the 'way to a language.' And thus we find these modern theorists still caught up within the same vicious circle of which Herder has accused his predecessors. We need reflection in order to have language and we need language in order to have reflection, yet many theorists presuppose one to explain the other, or vice versa. They give us an empty account. All linear, correspondence or representational models speak as if reflection is incidental or unrequired, but of course they already use language as if the two were somehow magically 'created.'

—A Creative Form of Life—

Herder's other major contribution to language theory is a model of linguisticality which explains its creative and dynamic aspect. Language is a form of life. *"In seeing language-using activities as 'forms of life' Herder anticipates Wittgenstein's re-orientation of modern*

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[141] Ibid.; p. 88. I quote here the translator Reginald Snell, *"The German word thus inadequately translated is Aufgehoben, which is here used, possibly for the first time, to mean* preserved by destruction *in the dialectical sense."*

[142] Ibid.; p. 88.

views of language towards this notion."[143] Language is acquired through activity of a special kind and it is the most natural thing for the human being to learn. Herder says, "*as inevitable as he is man ... it is incomprehensible to me how he could not invent language.*"[144] We were made to be linguistic.

The senses for Herder cannot be examined in isolation, "*we are one single thinking 'sensorium commune'.*"[145] Our body works as a unity and linguistic cognitive processes are simply one of the ways in which a person expresses his 'being alive'. We do have a certain attentive ability to focus on a certain single sense and push the others into a background, but no one sense can be experienced in isolation. In his aversion to Kant's Critiques, Herder claims that a theory which explains cognitive processes through an appeal to 'dead linguistic items' (faculties) will never explain the nature of a living language or a living mind. Similar to Merleau-Ponty, Herder maintains a strong opposition to the Kantian notion of distinct faculties of the mind.

We have now looked at Herder's account of the role that reflection might play in language origins and at his claim that some third 'cognitive space' is therefore essential. Next, very briefly, we can talk about how reason and the notion of 'play' are just further elaborations on the reflective type of awareness.

Herder claims that reason emerges in concert with language, that one implies the other. Rationality seems to depend upon articulation. It is not enough to act with apparent reasonableness. In order to be rational, one must be capable of articulating the reasons for one's actions. This obviously depends on the importance of a 'third' as well. There is no way

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[143] Falck; p. (appendix to second edition).

[144] Herder, *On Origin...*; p. 136.

[145] Ibid.; p. 144.

to compare two things unless one has some other thing by which to measure these two primary things. As much as this applies to the world of 'objective measuring' it applies just as essentially to subjective measuring (reflection). In order to make a meaningful comparison between two apparently unrelated aspects of conscious activity, some third 'semantic-creating' entity must come in to 'show and express' the relation. Herder mimics himself as that third, reflective capacity, "*I must break in this vicious circle, and consider it closely, and behold! it proves an entirely different thing: Ratio et Oratio!*"[146] In this case it seems that the perceiving observer can take up the stance of a 'meaning-making' being and thereby discover that 'to measure' and 'to speak' are in some sense identical. In order to quantify, we must first be able to reflect and then also to qualify our reckoning as expression.

Herder also talks about how play, in the form of imitation, might be used as a way of taking up this third, semantic level of understanding. When a person can signify some other thing by way of an imitational metaphor, a primitive form of language has emerged. In his example, mentioned previously, of imitating a sheep by way of verbalizing that 'bleating thing' a person can become linguistic by way of imitative articulation which as a form of play involves an understanding of the game (of communication). Reflection, correctness, expressive activity and creative play are all intimately related in this example. In the next chapter we shall examine similar more contemporary examples of such activities in the behavioural repertoire of an infant.

The fact that language according to Herder is an expressive activity or a form of life, and Wittgenstein and Taylor agree, indicates that it is thus inherently creative. Christina Erneling's Domestication Theory of language learning, which we shall discuss in the next

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[146] Ibid.; p.137.

chapter, extends the Wittgensteinian model concerning the innate creativity of language use.[147] Erneling in fact holds that when a child originally learns a language, he or she learns that it is magically creative. Children play with language and with reality as they test the limits of sensibility.[148] They must be linguistically 'domesticated' by teaching them the acceptable limits of discourse within a speaking community. The fact remains that if language is a skill generated as a creative 'form of life' the problems (for other theorists such as Chomsky and Fodor) of its infinite range and possible permutations does not even need to be addressed. Herder was more that a century ahead of his time with this apparently innocuous discovery. Perhaps one way to make this 'form of life' point even more radical is to claim that the living language is the activity of the *body*, and never an activity of a *mind*, which is the product of linguistic activity.

---Relocating Reflection---

Schiller might be seen as an echo of Herder. He re-traces the same path that Herder described as the way to a language but in the opposite direction.[149] Most of the following is

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[147] Christina Erneling, *Understanding Language Acquisition*; p. 151.

[148] It must be a deeply invigorating experience to learn the power of language. We tend to take it for granted, but any reflection on its inherent power will help one to appreciate the situation of a child which is learning to speak. Language is a form of magic that allows one to do things 'at a distance' which one would be powerless to do in any other way. Think of a three year old shouting some 'four-letter-word' at grandma, the power of that short morpheme is intoxicating.

[149] Bear with me while I put many of my own words into Schiller's mouth. The role which I shall *attempt* to play here is one of the 'naive poet' or the 'naive genius' which Schiller spoke about in his essay *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*. He himself at the time already doubted whether such a naive human being could ever exist given the fractured intellectual order of life in general. "*Poets of this naive category are no longer at home in an artificial age. They are indeed scarcely even possible, at least in no other wise possible except they* run wild *in their own age, and are preserved by some favourable destiny from its crippling influence. From society itself they can never arise; but from outside it they may sometimes appear, but rather as strangers at whom one stares, and as uncouth sons of*

my own interpretation of his work. Schiller, in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, makes the sensible case that we *leap* into language (infinity, or freedom, reflection, creativity) without knowing completely 'what is happening,' even as we are at the same time discovering partially 'what is happening.' Language is the reflective stance which is set against the perceived world. It is the opening to self-reflection in the form of art, performance, imitation, song, poetry, speech and writing.

But Schiller claims that on the one hand finite, prereflective perceptual existence is in essence lived as a *slave* to the passions and to the structure of its perceived world. On the other hand, the *leap* (through the other) into language and its accompanying infinitudes, is ultimately to live as a *slave* to the rules, laws and rhetorical conventions of the culture. According to Schiller, for most of our lives, we live as these 'fractured slaves' either chained to the shackles of our language or we can retreat blindly back to being enslaved by our unreflective passions. *"Man can be at odds with himself in a double fashion: either as savage if his feelings rule his principles, or as barbarian if his principles destroy his feelings."*[150] We end up being utterly unfree, even though we have already entered the sphere of the infinitude of linguistic possibility. To be caught up fully within the language is to be disconnected from our originary feeling; from life itself. *"And so gradually individual concrete life is extinguished, in order that the abstract life of the whole may prolong it sorry existence, and the state* [rule of language] *remains eternally alien to its citizens because nowhere does feeling discover it."*[151] We can live in a

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nature by whom one is irritated." (from *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*; p. 110.)
It seems to me that anyone who could write such a description must have, to some degree, already exemplified those very same characteristics in himself.

[150] Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*; (Fourth Letter) p. 34.

[151] Ibid.; (Sixth Letter) p. 41.

language even when we no longer know what it means, if it actually 'means' anything.[152]

For Schiller there is only one possible escape from these two dimensions of 'slavery' - and that is to rediscover in aesthetic experience our reflective access to the world of pre-linguistic sensuality . We can free ourselves from the 'prison of language' (and its infinitude) by rediscovering what it is like to feel - not only to feel ourselves, but also others and to sense their interpretations of a world. To reflect aesthetically is to go backwards into the very first mirror through which we originally came into the world. *"The Beauty that we seek lies already behind us, and we have leapt over her as we passed directly from mere life to pure form and object."*[153] After having gained infinity, transcendence and a form of freedom by going through the mirror of the other, we need to also go through the mirror which is the self. *"There is certainly a way back to sense even from the utmost abstraction; for thought stirs the inner sensation, and the conception of logical and moral unity passes into a feeling of sensual accord."*[154] Like Socrates, we need to know ourselves in order to know the universe. *"The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another, and another into myself."*[155] And there, in the mirror of that double reflective stance, we might finally come to understand ourselves and our worlds, as we are.

Schiller hopes for an 'Aesthetic Education' of humanity. For him this is the only way to overcome the blind leap from the 'slavery' of perception to the 'slavery' of language. It is in the contemplation of aesthetic appreciation and especially in 'play' where this unity of being

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[152] I have deliberately woven a Derridean text here.

[153] Ibid.; p. 121.

[154] Ibid.; p. 122.

[155] Merleau-Ponty, *The Eye and The Mind*; from Edie; p. 168.

is finally achieved. *"Man is only fully human when he plays."*[156] He begins to sound much like Herder when he describes our phenomenal experience of Beauty: *"...irresistibly seized and attracted by one quality, and held at a distance by another, we find ourselves at the same time in the condition of utter rest and extreme movement, and the result is that wonderful emotion for which reason has no conception and language no name."*[157] Schiller echoes Herder in his search for a 'third principle;' In order to describe Beauty *"we must go beyond the separation of these two realms (Kant's 'sense' and 'freedom') ... which will account for the facts of their experienceable harmony."*[158] In a further passage Falck then goes on, *"this third principle Schiller finds in our capacity to take a contemplative - neither theoretical nor practical - interest in the mere appearance or 'semblance' (Schein), of certain things around us."*[159] So Schiller takes us back to where Herder, some thirty years earlier, had claimed that our reflective life begins. In so doing, he seems to be making us whole again. I would venture to say that this return through a double-reflection is not merely 'Sentimental' yet neither is it purely 'Naive' but rather it is somewhere in between the two. Might I even suggest a meeting of the beauty and sublimity of life?[160]

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[156] Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*; p. 80.

[157] Ibid.; p. 80.

[158] Falck; Appendix to second edition.

[159] Ibid.;

[160] I want to acknowledge Susan Turner here, for bringing to my attention that in order to 'look at yourself and see yourself looking (at something)' it takes not just one mirror, but two. If you look at a reflection of your reflection, you shall see yourself as essentially 'some other person.' In the double-reflection you will be able to see your eyes looking, without looking into your own eyes.

CHAPTER FIVE: ALL THINGS ARE OWED TO JOY

"The illness which closed my eyes and ears ... plunged me into the unconsciousness of a new-born baby. ...I got used to the silence and the darkness that surrounded me and forgot that it had ever been different, until she came - my teacher - who was to set my spirit free.

Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word W-A-T-E-R, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten - a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that 'W-A-T-E-R' meant that wonderful, cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!"

- Helen Keller[161]

To begin this chapter we shall give a further clarification of the notion of 'silence' and then explicate two unique versions of language acquisition; the first is Erneling's contemporary thesis and the second Keller's own personal account.

—The Great Mute Land—

What is this mysterious phenomenon called 'silence?' One might best describe it as a rather complicated cognitive 'organ of life,' a certain power or capability to focus and divert one's attention. This act of focusing is both perceptually and linguistically effective. In fact it is a play (or a work) between all of the inseparable functions of the conscious-body. This silent focus appears early on in the life of a child and one might try to describe its pre-linguistic manifestation.[162] It is wonder, curiosity, interest, need, desire, and basically the driving life-force of the conscious-body. Perceptual attention can move from one sense to another. It can linger on a particular sense in a concentrated effort or explore the fuller nuances of, say, some visual encounter or some sweetly fragrant phenomenon. This attentive grasp can be pulled inward to focus on some emotional experience or pushed outward to meet

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[161] Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*; pp. 7, 8, 23.

[162] Edie, *Speaking and Meaning*; pp. 165-167.

the gaze of another. The driving force of this perceptual awareness is not a 'free will' nor an 'elan vitale,' it is the essential play of living activity. It is *what plays*. Like a wave which moves through the water, it is a similar meta-phenomenal emergence which is completely dependent upon the bodily and worldly forces of interaction which in their dynamic interplay constitute the phenomenal activities of the lived-body within a lived-world.

With the onset of the reflective and linguistic forms of conscious activities, and their accompanying complications (rational ethics, epistemologies and new emotional sophistications) the silent focus, which seemed before to be spontaneous, becomes somewhat fragmented and dichotomous. Bernard Dauenhauer, in his *Silence: the Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance*, gives an excellent explication of the complications of 'silence' and much of this section is pulled from his account. The addition of the linguistic dimension brings with it the capacity for deliberation into the realm of the phenomenon of 'silence.' As the 'abstract other' of language comes into the perceptual wholeness of presence, it opens up a new space within the attentive domain. The focus of silence, previously in the realm of the mute being, seems to bifurcate. No longer does it merely play in the horizonal domain of the presence of a lived-body and its lived-space, but now it can presently occupy the absence of linguistic temporality.

The attentive focus of an adequately linguistic person operates in two conscious-spaces at once, giving the person a visibility of perceptual presence as the primary existential status for most experiences and then 'moving over' to give priority status to the invisibility of linguistic absence at other times. Most often the attention works to straddle these two domains or to dance between them in the rhythm of a conversation.

I have tried here to describe 'silence' as the *living hinge* or the *nexus* in Merleau-Ponty's theory of Reversibility. In some sense, this silent 'agent' is the remnant of the historical notion of a 'will' or a 'transcendental ego.' Before we try to narrow it down further in our separate accounts of language acquisition, perhaps we should examine the nature of the perceptual

focus. What is the phenomenology of 'brute' attention?

—The Phenomenon of Perceptual Reflection—

We have already described the nature of the lived-body in chapter three and examined the 'sensorium commune' in chapter four. What we need now is to attempt to detail the living nature of perception, by turning our attention to one particular sense for the sake of simplicity and with the understanding that all the senses must 'work' in a similar fashion and also thus as a synthesized whole.

(For our general purposes we can use 'vision' as our sense of choice.) Merleau-Ponty's initial interest in psychology led him to adopt and maintain all of his life the theories of the Gestalt psychologists. These Gestaltist insights regarding perception can be traced to Herder, Schiller and especially Goethe. The basic notions of these theories concern the figure/background forms of apprehending a sensible world. Our senses are structured to conform to these basic principles. Our perception of any figure, form, quality or object is always set within a relation to a background. We normally do not directly and clearly perceive the background, but rather, it accumulates over our duration of experience to gain some sort of concrete status in our full perceptual field. We can perceive a figure only as the thing brought out from the background and that field or background remains decisive in the experience of a figure by giving it identity, endurance, contrast, etc..

If you look around the room and pick out some small item on a wall, the figure/background formula becomes quite clear. If you attempt to 'see' the whole wall, you will find that it is impossible to make 'it' into your figure. Our senses seem to work in this 'here' and 'there' construct. The wall, as the initial background, can only become contained by the focus if the vision is centered to some arbitrary spot in the empty space between yourself and the wall and then the background becomes the mainstay of an implicit focus. This example, if indeed one is in a room, is meant to show the constraints on the figure-size. Of

course our perception is, like language, a living thing and we do not ever perceive 'bits of data'. Our gaze moves constantly and incessantly thus creating variations of focuses which give us the illusion that the background is really the foreground and that we are visually in the world much more immediately than we actually are.

If we think back to Herder's description of the body as the 'sensorium commune' and his further descriptions of how reflection initially occurs as the sense of hearing mediates between the outwardness of sight and the inwardness of the lived-affects of touch, we can understand that the body itself as living perceiver has its own innate Gestalt-being. The phenomenal world is constantly 'invading' the openness of our lived-body. As this perceptive body deals with its environment, it can only cope with it by 'attending' to particulars set against a wholeness of a generality. The focus, like the instinct of the animal, dances through the variations of sensitivity and is buoyed to actions, impelled both by the background and the foreground of experience.

We might now inquire as to how this conscious-body can deal with a language. In order to support Herder we must turn to the contemporary literature on the subject of language acquisition.

---Learning to Be Free---

We have briefly encountered the Domestication model in the previous chapter. Erneling supports the thesis that language is learned in the same way that other, less complex skills, are learned.[163] Of course she also holds that no other human or animal skill comes close to the incredible and unprecedented innovations that a language brings into the life of the articulate. Language has a life of its own. *"Language gets its meaning from the language game*

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[163] Erneling; pp. 152-175.

and the form of life in which it is embedded." [164] Erneling's views on language are in fact very close to those of Merleau-Ponty which we have already discussed, with some of my own innovations concerning the temporal nature of the discourse, in previous chapters.

We can look at Erneling's discussion of the child's natural progression from the learning of behavioural skills (grasping objects, chewing, etc.) to the learning of non-behavioural skills such as imitation and play. She makes the difference between these two, in essence, very much like Taylor's account of reflection, "*The child is clearly seen as abandoning the end of an action to play only with the means.*"[165] Here again is that notion of pausing as something unique in the cognitive capacity of the child. Of course all infants are very good at 'pausing' because that is just a very natural thing for them to do. However, once the baby is able to accomplish some sort of basic skills, it becomes more and more fully oriented for an activity-based existence. Yet at times in the impulsion of action, the child will 'abandon the *end*' of whatever it is involved in doing and '*play* only with the *means*.' It is in these moments of inward or secondary outward attention that a child will begin to develop its focusing skills in a more refined manner. This capacity to focus on the 'means' rather than on the end of activity can be taken as either the opportunity to change attentive stances outwardly or perhaps to focus on lived-affects which are happening inwardly. In either case, we can see the beginnings of a 'third stance' developing. "*If freedom is to have room in which to move ... there must be something to hold it away from its objectives, it must have a field...*"[166]

We should now turn our attention to the emergence of 'play' as the primary reflective and linguistic adaptation. "*Speaking a language is just as playing ... it involves combining different*

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[164] Ibid.; p. 111.

[165] Erneling; p. 181.

[166] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 438.

skills and transferring behaviour."[167] Erneling has a wonderful discussion of play and the game under consideration is 'peek-a-boo'. Now the author has centered on the audible aspect of the 'boo' because her whole thesis gives the primary linguistic function to the voice and the sound, (a position reminiscent of Herder's discussion of imitation and the vital role that both hearing and sound play in that account). But what happens if we examine the 'peek' instead?

Playing is the first cognitively explicit instance where the child (a few months old) can feel what the 'other' is feeling. This is not some fantastical psychic mind-melding nor a conceptual unity (like the understanding of a mathematical function), but it is something deeper and yet of the same sort of intersubjective veracity. The child and the mother can play 'peek-a-boo' and actually feel the other's feeling of joy at an explicitly meaningful level. There is usually an acknowledgement in the perception of the other's behaviour (laughter), but most times those joyful feelings are exchanged through the mischievous look in the eyes.[168] The feeling of enjoyment (a bodily felt joy) passes through the eyes - so the game is initially not about hiding the person, which in Erneling's account becomes connected to the sound of re-discovery. Initially the game is actually about hiding that feeling (the joy) by covering the eyes. When the eyes are once again uncovered and the feeling of joy reappears, there is some very significant thing being communicated here. The mother is (saying) showing the baby, "I feel the same way that you feel" as they gaze laughingly into one another's eyes, then she covers her eyes and the feeling disappears. Momentarily the child senses an emptiness - a deep anticipation (and need) of being re-connected grows - and just as suddenly her eyes reappear and the power of the shared feeling of joy is magnified to even higher levels of experience. *"He who does not see that joy is an important force in the world misses the essence of life.*

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[167] Erneling; p. 183.

[168] One might also here refer to the first smile of a child as a very minimal form of a reflective stance. See in Rene Spitz, *A Genetic Field Theory of Ego Formation* (p. 18) "*...the smiling response ... represents a conscious, reciprocal communication*" and also Freud on 'smiling response' (p. 19).

Joy is a spiritual element that gives vicissitudes unity and significance."[169] Eventually, the child will laugh uncontrollably as the game reaches new peaks of enjoyment.

This game is not just the experience of sharing certain feelings and bringing on a sense of reflectiveness. It is also a way to show that we can control our connections and our disconnections - that we can communicate deliberately, *"...after ten months - the child begins to initiate the play."*[170] The 'boo' also gives the child a sense of an audible connection to the meaningfulness of the feeling. It is as if the 'ghost' of the other bursts into the conscious-body of the child, scaring the infant 'out-of-itself' for a moment, thus making even more room for reflection and language to enter. An innocent game called 'peek-a-boo' may disclose the most profound of human skills. *"Play, and later language, liberate the child from external, immediate constraints."*[171] It is the first game that every child learns to play in one form or another, *"...but why call it a mere game, when we consider that in every condition of humanity it is precisely play, and play alone, that makes man complete and displays at once his twofold nature."*[172] It is the *'joie de vivre'* that fills us with meaning.

—Silent Darkness and Joy—

In the quote from Helen Keller opening this chapter she describes how it was water flowing over one hand while her teacher signed the word in the other hand that opened up her sensual awareness to the joy of meaning. What was so significant about that particular set of circumstances? Why did the water decipher the hidden 'code'?

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[169] Helen Keller, *The Open Door*; p. 50.

[170] Erneling; p. 190.

[171] Ibid.; p. 182.

[172] Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*; p. 79. The reference to a twofold nature is *i)* the sensual impulse - to life, and *ii)* the formal impulse - to form (language).

Keller already had a gesture for mother, (stroking her own cheek), yet Miss Sullivan could not get her to see that the spelling of M-O-T-H-E-R into her hand also meant 'mother' - even if, while the signing was being done, Keller was hugging her mother. Of course by this time, several months of intensive training had been undertaken. Signing of the letters of the alphabet had gone on continually until she had learned them behaviourally as an essentially meaningless sort of game. Keller was already familiar with these different sign-patterns, yet she understood none of it reflectively. Whatever this 'game' was, it made no meaningful impression on her.

Perhaps the signing of 'mother' in Keller's hand as she held on to her mother could never be appreciated because in her dark and silent world, her mother meant everything to her. That presence meant *mother - hugged - warmth - me - love - life - world - everything;* how could a few symbolic gestures in the palm of one hand from a near stranger capture the living power? That only Keller's own stroking of her cheek could do.

Miss Sullivan would sign D-O-L-L into Keller's hand as she held on to her doll, but nothing seemed to connect that word to that object. She tried spelling W-O-O-L or C-H-A-I-R while Keller was in contact with a ball of yarn or a chair, but no sign of recognition. Again, these are, like 'mother', all very asymmetrical but in an opposite sense. While the tactile and smell-laden presence of mother overwhelmed those pitiful signs, the ball of wool and the chair asymmetrically underwhelmed the signing-activity which was the living pattern traced out on the hand of the child. These might be like attempting to match the identity of a symphony in progress to the sheets of notational music in someone who could see and hear but knew nothing about either.

Finally, after an emotional moment, as the teacher held one of Keller's hands under the flowing water from the spout of the pump, while in her other hand Miss Sullivan signed the appropriate word W-A-T-E-R, some crucial balance was reached. Suddenly, the symmetry of the actions made the essential connection possible - and those five symbols livingly

gestured repeatedly into one hand made sense (identity) with the 'living' water as it flowed over the other hand. A stillness, a realization and suddenly the meaning began to flow through her body and Keller began to feel the life of language. The incredible balanced force of phenomenal being coming into her from both sides at once . . . and at last she could reflect. At last she understood activity as expressed and as impressed simultaneously.

In the same way that Merleau-Ponty describes the left hand and right hand both touching each other and being touched as most simply meaning the unity of the lived-body, Keller felt the unity of her body as the means to a language. Her hands met through the unity of her body and finally she became aware of the much greater significance of linguistic reflection. She became meaning, as Merleau-Ponty would say, "her life became essence and existence intertwined in meaning."

The foregoing is my own explication of Keller's story[173] and it was meant to show how reflection and language emerge together, but even more importantly, how both of them can become real only when they are embedded and embodied in a living way. Meaning is living and we as language users create the meaning of our lives as we live them, in the same way we intersubjectively create the meaning of our language as we live it.

In the concluding chapter we shall review some of the innovative contributions to meaning theory expressed by a variety of contributors throughout this essay. We shall also try to show how other theories of meaning lack the essential aspects which give meaning its life.

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[173] Keller, *The Story of My life.*

CHAPTER SIX: SOME CONCLUSIONS

"A commonly held misimpression of both Taoism and Zen is that they reject the use of words. They use words but they clearly understand the effects and the limits of them. This distinction is important. Both traditions are assiduously mindful of avoiding the pitfalls of a word system that builds its own structure of understanding and invents its own truths. So Taoism and Zen return to direct awareness. This is why the insight they engender is both ordinary and exceptional, both common and profound. ...Taoism and Zen seem enigmatic because words are turned against words to undo themselves so that the word system is prevented from spinning its own illusion of understanding.

Language, like pure intellect, moves experience inexorably into the abstract, away from the finality of grounded reality. After all the fancy words and profound thoughts, after all the sublime rhetoric and transcendent experience engendered by the *spell of words*, there remains the certain bounds set by the natural absolutes of [phenomenal] existence. Words may fabricate abstractions and attempt to disconnect experience from this earthly condition. But all words, regardless of how high they soar, are ultimately rooted in the fact of substantiality, far closer to the soil of *feeling* and *instinct* than a deliberating consciousness often recognizes or readily admits."

- Ray Grigg[174]

The conscious-body is the ultimate locus of meaning. As the hyper-dialectic of the various 'reversibilities' swirl around and through the openness of its conscious carnality, the lived-body, as a temporal sensorium is always 'pregnant with meaning'. We are the self-reflective 'pausings' in the inherent 'tension' of being. If life is meaning, then each lived-body is the focal place of the creative generation of that meaning. *"To speak of 'place' existentially/ontologically is to name the primary locus of the generation of meaning and the becoming of selfhood, the domain wherein both lived time and lived space originate, coming to be together in the horizon of our embodied existence."*[175] Living beings recreate and regenerate; living is the only means to life.

—Retracing Our First Steps—

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[174] Grigg, *The Tao of Zen*; pp. 193-194, 197. (My italics)

[175] Robert Burch, *Lived Experience: Taking a Measure of the Topic*; from *Phenomenology & Pedagogy*, vol.8, 1990; p. 156.

In the previous chapter, we spoke briefly about the game of 'peek-a-boo' where certain emotional experiences are livingly exchanged through the reciprocal (dialectical) opening and closing gazes of the players. If *hearing* is the primary sense of linguistic meaning-making (Herder and Erneling), then it seems only natural to assert that *sight* is the primary sense of perceptual meaning-making (Merleau-Ponty). The senses of sight and hearing seem to grasp the world from a distance while the sense of touch is more immediate, *"the object of touch is a force which we endure; the object of the eye and the ear is a form which we create."*[176] The senses of *touch, taste* and *smell* are then the most primitive and carnal of our other senses. It is, for perception and language-use, those meaning-laden lived-affects or echoes produced by these carnal senses which allow the 'world' to deeply invade our bodies and to initially awaken these same bodies to a world at some intimate, sensual level.

When we speak to one another our eyes can be fixed in a direct contact without our feeling that we are somehow 'invading' one another. In fact conversation is most lucid when there is a sustained eye contact. But once the human noise is cut out, direct eye contact becomes heavy and usually burdensome, and only two lovers in love can sustain a 'silent' gaze for more than a few brief moments. *"The other's gaze is felt as unbearable only if nothing is said ... except lovers."*[177] Why is it so? In Werner Herzog's words, "is this *screaming of silence*" magnified to some unbearable dimension when the focus of two perfectly linguistic gazes meet through the eyes in the vacuum of meaningful human sounds?

Before we had a language, we lived in a world without the complications of 'non-being' and 'doubt' and 'deceit' and 'chaos.' Before we could quantify and measure 'reality' as some *ratio* and simultaneously express that reckoning as some *oratio*, we lived in a world of certainty - a world which our language released into the 'dehiscence' of freedom - but also, a

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[176] Schiller, *On the Aesthetic...*; p. 125.

[177] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 361.

world which broke internally or collapsed when we realized that 'our parents had lied'. Innocence is the most incredible of experiences; unfortunately, we only realize this in retrospect (Schiller).

If our eyes are the primary sources of perceptual meaning-making in that they give us an external correspondence to what we already feel inside is our reality - then our eyes are our science. These eyes can bring home a 'truth' which has as yet *no negation*. Seeing is believing. *"[Galileo] was the first scientist to actually start using his eyes, both figuratively and physically. And in that sense, he was responsible for the age of science we now enjoy."*[178]

As pure perceivers, we make our extra-linguistic (ideally, non-hearing) way in the world by focusing determinately upon the *visible*. But what happens when my meaning-making eyes meet your meaning-making eyes? In the same way that 'my hands touching your hands and thus also being touched by your hands' produce a sensual unity of our bodies *"...and he and I are like organs of one single inter-corporeality,"*[179] - likewise 'my eyes seeing into your eyes and also being looked into by yours' produce a perceptual unity of our conscious-bodies. Emotions meet through the meeting of our eyes in the same way that motions meet through the meeting of our hands. The carnal senses of two persons intertwined exchange a convergence of extensional activities, while the visual senses of two persons interlocked exchange a divergence of intensional activities. We give ourselves away with every look.

We need only to catch the glimpse of the other to appropriate a perceptually and conceptually meaningful acquisition of 'another thinking person.' Merleau-Ponty, on Husserl's notion of introjection, says, *"I know unquestionably that that man over there sees, that my sensible world is also his, because I am present at his seeing, it is visible in his eyes' grasp of the scene."*[180]

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[178] A quote from Stephen Hawkings. John Boslough, *Stephen Hawking's Universe*; p. 33.

[179] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 168.

[180] Ibid.; p. 169.

We can already be aware of the other's human nature in merely looking at his eyes gazing at some thing. *"A form that resembles me was there, but busy at secret tasks, possessed by an unknown dream. Suddenly a gleam appeared beneath those eyes... Everything which for my part is based upon the animal of perceptions and movements... - including my 'thought,' ... falls all at once into the other person."*[181] We, as conceiving humans, can become intertwined with other conceiving beings by merely looking at the 'content' of their gazes. We fall into them, conceptually.

In his comment on Sartre's account of how 'the look' is a struggle between the self and the other, where each subject attempts to turn the other into an object until one finally succeeds, Merleau-Ponty accuses Sartre, in this cold dialectic, of referring to the meeting of two insects.[182] Eyes are not the organs of such a detached, inherent coldness; they are the living mirrors of our emotions and they should reflect a complete range of emotional lived-affects. The eyes make intersubjective meaning visible.

These preceding paragraphs may sound naive in the face of our language-informed existences and sophisticated behaviours. If meaning is, as Derrida claims, completely bound up in the language itself as the 'differance' then all of these references to extra-linguistic meaning might seem irrelevant and might be nothing more than linguistic fantasies. There might be the danger of that being so if verbal language were the first and only 'mirror' which produced meaning. But, as stated earlier, our bodies are gesturally meaningful at an implicit or spontaneous level and all social animals exist within such essentially meaning-laden worlds.

We cannot escape from being linguistic, and even if we could, would we want to return to the 'bruteness' and the danger of a life as one of Rousseau's *'noble savages'*? I believe that I have provided many examples of extra-linguistic meaning: from Merleau-Ponty's account of our lived-experience of space to our first time experiences, from the non-linguistic

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[181] Ibid.; p. 170.

[182] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 361.

meaning of deaf and blind activity to the accounts of language acquisition as *forms of life*. Linguistic meaning could not have appeared *ex nihilo* and the natural appropriation of a language does not magically exterminate the informing capacity of pure perception. When we express ourselves, there is some 'thing' more than the words we are using, that we are speaking about. The realm of meaning is not one all-encompassing linguistic horizon of active existence, there is a whole range of meanings and all of them contribute to the meaningfulness of the human experience.

We can look once again at the Herder-inspired account of how a 'third stance' is essential to gain access to a sign. In order to experience the active connection between subject and object (the very structure of language) one must become that relation and yet be neither that subject nor that object. The carnal senses (touch, taste and smell) give us the *basic subject* lived-affects, feelings and sensations which arouse our sensitive bodies. These senses are the primary sources of pleasure and pain. The visual sense (sight) gives us the *basic object*, as a disengaged relation where the affected subject can know 'the thing' as an extensional substance in part because of one's 'carnal' familiarity with it (texture, taste and smell) and in other part because of one's visual encounter with it as 'out there.' So in effect, the *'in here carnality'* has a relation to the *'out there visibility.'* This is basically a linear relationship; certainly there is perceptual meaning in the sense that what one sees corresponds to what that seeing makes one feel 'in here.' The two are in a one dimensional relationship because the conscious subject has no way to 'carnally sense' the things which it does not see, nor can it 'visually image' the things which it merely feels. There is no reflective capacity.

In order to take up the 'third stance,' some other external stimulation must make itself known to that subject. The sheep, as an object, might 'bleat' and as I am temporally attracted to that audible signal, I can then 'see' the connection between my 'sheep sensings' as being both carnal and visual; as being 'in here' and also 'out there.' The 'bleating' indicates or signifies this relationship between myself as a carnal, sensual subject and that white, woolly

thing as visible object. So the sound of the 'bleating' as I take it up in my auditory *consciousness* is really a sentence which says, "*this* (my feeling) is *that* (the sheep)!" The fact that I can take up the conscious-sensing of the sound provides that important 'third stance' from which I can know (reflectively) the relationship between subject and object. Very easily this reflective awareness can be turned around as I imitate the sheep as an expression, where the carnal, conscious-body says, "*this* (bleating sound) is *that* (the sheep)!" In this act I recall, rather than abandon, the end by playing with the means.

The sheep example is used here to illustrate Herder's ideas of language origin, but a much better example is Erneling's 'peek-a-boo' which works in exactly the same way except that the carnal-emotional thing which makes room for reflection is the feeling of joy - the 'third stance.' The ability to change the focus of one's attention back and forth between different senses is the emergence of the cognitive capacity to reflect. However, as the language becomes much more complex than merely a 'boo' or a 'bleating' this reflective (third) stance between sensual and visual perception, called conceptual expression/impression or speaking/listening, begins to take on *a life of its own*. So, what we end up having is two distinct forms of conscious-being which work in a synthesis, 1) the sensual/perceptual (direct subject to object relation) and 2) the linguistic/conceptual (reflective) awareness. Meaning is the synthesis - a unity of the whole body which also includes within it an abstraction of the other (or others) as a living language. Language is the presence of the absent other within the self of the lived-body.

In a dialogue, there is a kind of transcendence experienced where these two lived-bodies through understanding become the active unity of a lived-meaning. Something other than the individual 'selves' is created: something greater. This is '*the explicit* <u>something</u> *it is like to be intersubjectively connected.*'

It happens that for our purposes a language is the most accessible way to express and define meaning, but there also happens to be no such 'thing' as a language, much less a

meaning-producing and sustaining thing. We are constantly creating new and never before used phrases and expressions because the meaning is not in the words or sentences themselves, but in our use of those conventional signs. It is the activity of our speaking which both produces and interprets a linguistic meaning. Slang words, such as the word 'groovy' from the 1960's, are created for the sole purpose of expressing something extra-linguistic. A feeling, a mood, an attitude, a style of being which was undefined. Perhaps it had something to do with the grooves on a record album and the moves that one could make to the music, and perhaps also to certain psychedelic experiences, clothes, food, art, etc., but this word was not meaningful in the linguistic sense of 'differance' but rather it was meaningful in the lived-experience of 'difference'. A speaker or listener could know what that word really meant only by living and acting in a certain way, a 'groovy' way.

Hearing, as a meaning-making sense, is quite different from that of sight. We all see the same phenomena, at least within a certain range. We all hear a similar world as well, but the intersubjective nature of meaning as made through hearing and verbal expression is quite unlike perceptual meaning. The meaning of a language is invisible, even when one looks at a text. The meaning must be deciphered, a text must be read. Some time must be reinvested.

We can quickly look here at some of the differences between kinds of writing and their ontological or semantic consequences. The ideographs of Oriental writing appeal to perceptual/visual meaning, while the Western written text is dependent upon the dead, fragmentary bits of noise encoded into a script. Western writing refers directly back to the sounds used to articulate the concepts in a language; it is an 'abstract-death'. Oriental ideographic writing refers directly back to the perceptual forms of vision and activity which connote lived-experience: 'abstract-life.'

Oriental writing is metaphorical, Western writing is dependent on the symbolizations of bits of noise patterns. Those who look for meaning within the written forms of Western languages are trying to build meaning out of a linguistic puzzle whose original, aesthetic

representation has been effectively destroyed.[183] The Western text is a puzzle whose meaning must be livingly reinterpreted. Those linguistic 'mounds' of puzzle-fragments (words) have no reliable interpretive picture by which to recreate their original meaning. All we can hope to meaningfully find is where each piece of language fits in that mound of lexicon from which it has been removed, but otherwise, each term is a negation and meaningless in and of itself, except when interpreted in terms of lived-experience.

Those who turn to logical reconstruction of meaning have now thrown away the pieces of the puzzles altogether and retained some formal variables as representatives or 'resembling pieces'. From these variables, they try to reconstruct meaning in some kind of phantom world where the living puzzle itself has been rejected. Their intention is no longer to re-set the living puzzle of meaning, but rather, it is to find some other useful purpose for these (apparently useless) pieces which, given a certain quantified and operational function, might be used to symbolically prop up some scientific edifice or empirical model. These discarded pieces (the actual words) fit quite nicely under the sometimes shaky legs of the science-model and give it the appearance of absolute steadiness - a final monument to death and its victory?

From a Merleau-Ponty-like living perspective, the logic-based Anglo-American theories of meaning and their sister epistemologies are basically meaningless, unless of course one believes in objective minds and objective bodies through which such meanings might be given an 'objective life' - which is, from the living point of view of the body-subject, impossible.

—Focus to Focus—

Let us now examine more closely that relationship between perception and language-use. As already explained in the previous chapter, 'silence' is the living synthesis of a conscious-body whose attentive focus operates like the living 'figure' made meaningful in the

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[183] Please excuse my rather clumsy metaphors in this section, but how does one speak to those who have banished the life out of language, only to turn and attempt to describe language itself as if they existed within some other realm altogether? What can it all mean to them?

context of the background of lived-experience. In other words, any person's attention to present conscious experience works (or plays) as an active form of the figure-to-background model. Now if we look more closely at the post-structuralist account of linguistic meaning (and, for them, there is essentially only this one type of meaning), we shall see that it too has this same figure-to-background reality. According to Derridean 'theory' any word or expression is meaningful only in its 'differance' from the remaining whole of the language. For these philosophers there are no positive terms and meaning is, in a sense, a negation; where the particular foreground of an utterance creates a 'gap' in the meaningful general background of the complete language.

If we assume that Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception as that of a figure-to-background configuration is correct; that any explicit perception is meaningful only when set against a background of generally implicit perceptions which create a complete field on which the perceived object might 'stand out'. And if we also adopt the above outlined post-structuralist view of linguistic meaning as a figure-to-background schema, then perhaps, what the 'silence' (the attentive focus, interest, or cognitive drive) amounts to is the constant 'intertwining' and 'divergence' between these two forms of conscious activity. When we speak, we express our focal lived- or living-experience through the textual parts of a language which lives 'superimposed' over most of our lived-through experiences. In whatever way each of these figure-to-background Gestalts are activated, they work complimentarily as two sets, two distinctive features of our conscious-bodies. We are, in effect, the synthesis of two complete sets of cognitive presence. We can express our attention to lived-experience in the present through our linguistic activity and we understand the utterances of others as linguistic figures which focus upon the appropriately linguified 'features' of our meaningful lived-experiences. As our vocabulary expands, so too does our capacity to understand what the others might be saying. And likewise expanded is our ability to express emotional or traumatic experiences which have never been privileged to 'see' the light of conscious

reflection: a reflection made possible when the cognitive focus of lived-experience aligns itself with the appropriate focus of linguistic attention.

We are one another's ciphers as we teach/learn through our dialogues and senses. To bring these out in some examples: in my articulation of certain of my lived-experiences I can help someone else to bring to light some similarly affective experience which they had never before realized that they had lived through and were in fact still living through. As a concrete example of how these 'double focuses' work intersubjectively, you might be able to point me, through language use alone, by directing my visual focus to the south-west corner of a certain building where I might see a blackburnian warbler sitting on the ledge above the uppermost window. In a double-sense of 'reversibility' my lived-experience through an expression in our language can change the focus of your affectively conscious-body, but at the same time your language can redirect the perceptual focus of my visual attention. Through this double-aspect theory of 'reversibility' the figure-to-background natures of all experience, sensual, perceptual, and conceptual/linguistic can be aligned into new and clearer perspectives.

In *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, Merleau-Ponty reiterates Husserl's account of 'other minds.' *"For Husserl the experience of others is first of all 'esthesiological'..."*[184] Merleau-Ponty conveniently divides experience, on Husserl's behalf, into three progressive domains which become synthesized in the eventual knowing of another person. *"What I perceive to begin with is a different 'sensibility' (Empfindbarkeit), and only subsequently a different man and a different thought."*[185]

Our original encounter with other humans is at the carnal level, the experience of a new sensibility through touch (as an infant), which eventually becomes a perceptibility of

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[184] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*; p. 168.

[185] Ibid.; p. 168.

another person and even farther of another consciousness. Like in Herder's account of the subjective progression to a language, Husserl moves from sensibility to linguisticality (first touch, then sight, and finally language). Merleau-Ponty continues that for Husserl there is a concomitant unfolding of self-consciousness with this conscious awakening to the other. If both sensuality and the body are included in all linguistic accounts of beings, the problem of other minds is then never a problem at all because the linguistic and reflective capacity of a self is only made possible in direct connection to an other linguistic/perceiving/sensual being. In some crucial and necessary way, I am, in becoming a conceptualizing self, also an other. For without that sensual, perceptual and linguistic contact with that other, I could never become a human self.

—Intentionality and Reversibility—

In all of our dimensions of being, we are meaning - both individually and as a whole lifeworld (another Gestalt). In Husserl's sense of meaning as being the acts of intentionality fulfilled by phenomenal intuition in conscious experience, each of us is living meaning. We are not objects or things endowed with some sort of autonomous existence and neither are we the transcendental egos described as the non-phenomenal sources of meaning-seeking activity. Both of those notions (objects and egos) are the necessary inventions and conventions of our ability to use a language. 'Meaning' is the real phenomenal world of sensual and perceptual tensions and if we can suspend fully our belief in those constructions of a linguistic non-world, we might yet see one another as the truly meaningful phenomena which we are.

The 'silence' is a meaningful pause which mediates the two forms of 'reversibility' in Merleau-Ponty (the reversibility of the body and the world through perception, and the reversibility of lived-experience and culture-of-others through language use). It can be rendered as the focus of the lived-body, pausing in its active immersion within its own linguistic realm. In those moments of unspoken and unthought meditation or participation,

we can become the 'play' of the phenomenal tensions of active being. *"Language is a play with the body."*[186] There is meaning beyond language, and that meaning is who we are in our sensual perceptions of ourselves. Schiller's thesis for an 'Aesthetic Education' is his call to us to leave the seriousness of epistemologies and the logic of language, and come to play in the meaning that is life itself. We cannot fully educate by saying, we must educate by showing (as Rousseau has said in *Emile*), because children learn the meaning not through words but through activity. As Herder, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Erneling would say, "children learn their words through activity." And language is nothing but active phenomenal meaning of being, abbreviated into a temporal world. In that strange linguistic world of pure meaning-time, everything is possible, but in fact, nothing is actual.

—The End Happens—

In response to the postmodern proclamation of the 'death of the subject' and the resulting scenario that meaning is not made by the phenomenal subject (the conscious body) but is caught up within the language itself, an answer emerges. The subject is not some ideal entity (or unity) which 'lives' within the brain of the individual human and constitutes all experience. Any such ideal notion is a linguistic invention. However, the fact remains that language is an invention of the human species and any concrete meaning which such a 'anthropo-historical' language can have must be found in the lived-experiences of the conscious body. Meaning is not abstract. Language is. Experience is always real, even though it may be imbued with linguistic abstractions, which will be meaningless unless they can attach to some relevant actual experience. By incarnating the subject within the lived presence of existential space and giving it an access to 'the lived history of humanity' through language, Merleau-Ponty has answered the postmodern obsession with temporal abstractions

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[186] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*; p. 194.

and their subsequent embrace of the 'meaninglessness of life'.

At first consideration, it may appear to be a dangerous move to deliberately invite persons to return to their senses and rediscover reflectively their true selves within their own embodied being. Such a journey, however, is not a shortcut to hedonism. It is, on the contrary, a rebirth into a style of understanding which has rid itself of the linguistic apparitions and 'Mephistophelian' entities of cults and other theoretical dementia. The rediscovery of the subject as body, is a long and awakening journey. When subjectivity returns to its sensuous roots in the play of the senses, it also returns to the whole of the perceived world. We are always sensually immersed within a whole world even though we may act 'as if' there were only separate objects. Senses are inseparable from the phenomenal tensions which stimulate them into activating being. The senses are brought to life in an atmosphere of sights, weights, textures, depths, sounds, smells and tastes. The body subject lives within the tensions of the phenomenal world. When the body reclaims subjectivity and the 'mind' is discovered to be merely a product of the body-subject's acquired language - one will come to realize that conscious acts (of intentionality) are neither the acts of a language nor of a 'mind', but the acts of the living, language-using body.

We, as human beings, have managed to live in our 'disembodied' condition with both *euphoric* and *traumatic* results. In keeping with Schiller's thesis, we can surely understand that in order to know ourselves, as individuals and as a species, it was necessary to escape from the finitude of spontaneous life into the infinitude of a free spirit. However, when this dichotomous existence threatens to destroy life and intersubjective engagement (through linguistic insanity), we must put our fractured selves back together and reclaim the sort of life where meaning is made rational by being sensually sensible. Although we may lose our 'minds', we shall rediscover our language which will become grounded within the life of our conscious-bodies.

If this return to our essential selves takes place, what will happen to philosophy, to

science, to ethics, and to 'spirituality'? To begin with, if meaning is, in its fullest sense, the combined activities (conscious and physical) of the body-subject, then each of our meaningful existences is always in some sort of essential overlap. My activities, whether they are linguistic or physical, intermingle with those same activities of many others. Meanings intertwine and diverge; they enhance and corrupt each other in the larger context of our active existences. We can each clarify, support or destroy one another's meanings.

The meaning of science is, like that of any language, in its use. And because the meanings of the many individual beings always intermingle, the practice of science or of any other language takes on ethical dimensions. Here we can recall that the Herder-Taylor notion of 'rightness' is not contained in the fact of the expressed activity matching the designed or preferred outcome or behaviour. The 'rightness' is in what such expressed acts mean to those who utter them and also to those upon whom they impact. Science still operates with the non-reflective 'ethic' that *"want banana" is right because it gets the banana*. Rightness is a moral value which can have no lesser appeal than to all of those involved conscious-bodies themselves. Simply put, the answer to the above question is: philosophy becomes an ethical science whose meaning is the aesthetic experience of all the conscious bodies.

How does one begin this journey? Perhaps ironically it seems, one must convince oneself that one no longer has a 'mind.' In the same sense that Descartes, in his Meditations neglected to acknowledge a language (which makes the doubting of the existence of the self or the 'I' possible), we have dismissed the metaphysical notion of a mind, while still believing (through the for grantedly taken force of language) that each of us still has one. The 'mind' is (as Herder suggested) merely the reflected historical presence of all of one's understood and already lived through language. As the whole of one's used-language, this remembrance of a past linguistic journey is not the conceptual baggage of a 'mind', except in the form of idiosyncratic linguistic beliefs or hopes about truth. One has no 'mind' but one is, rather fortunately, a conscious body. One is a body who plays with language (and with other

bodies), but also then, one who understands the real meaning of a life.

As a final bit of meaning-time glimpsed from my research for this paper, I would suggest that the best way to the experience of Schiller's call to the aesthetic is to take the time which we have consciously and culturally inserted into every thing in the world out from where it does not belong and bring it back to ourselves. We need a new measure of time which accurately reflects our being-in-the-world. We need to find the real presence in Spacetime, that still mythical place where everything actually happens.

We can conclude that our lived-time is our language and our being-in-lived-space is our meaning. And happiness just happens/is.

"Joy is the mainspring in the whole
Of endless Nature's calm rotation,
Joy moves the dazzling wheels that roll
In the great Time-piece of Creation".

- Friedrich Schiller[187] *"The Hymn to Joy"*

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[187] Schiller, *The Poems and Ballads of Schiller*; trans. by Edward Lytton, p. 286. In order to give these lines some resonance with my thesis, I might have to transpose them to mean, *"Joy is the force of reflection which moves the 'mechanisms' of langauge."*

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